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Lovell's International Series

The Failure of Elisabeth

BY

E. FRANCES POYNTER

AUTHOR OF "MY LITTLE LADY," AMONG THE HILLS," ETC.

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

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11.

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THE FAILURE OF ELISABETH.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES A LITTLE SCHOOL-GIRL.

My heroine sits in a brown stuff gown and a brown straw hat on board a Rhine boat. She holds a story-book in her hand, but it lies half closed in her lap, her finger marking the place, whilst she gazes at the rushing river and the storied crags before her ; for she is but lately seventeen, it is her first journey abroad, and the Rhine has been new-made for her to-day. And since it is the heroine of these pages who is sitting there before us, it may be well at once, as saving further trouble, to enumerate such of her virtues, qualities, faults, and accomplishments as may most fitly serve to introduce her to the reader. Among the first I may be allowed, perhaps, to reckon the fact that she is but seventeen. There is one year only in each mortal's life in which he or she can be seventeen ; and if in the case of youths it is apt to be an awkward, bungling, officious year in their stumbling progress along the earlier paths of life, in respect of maidens there is often a certain innocence of motives and ignorance of consequences, a blind and trustful way of looking at things, that gives them a sort of bloom and freshness which in itself may be held a virtue, so that one may be sorry that they should presently have to be eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and all the years that follow.

My heroine, then, though her cheeks are pale, and no one would call her a beauty, has yet this soft youthful bloom of seventeen ; she has also (to be more particular) charming brown eyes, of an expression at once shy and honest, and abundant brown hair, that waves and curls a little on her forehead. For accomplishments, she

has a smattering of Latin, can read and talk both French and German with facility, has studied some twenty or thirty problems of geometry, and knows the use of her needle and of the globes. As for faults, she seeks them out diligently, having had a pious scheme of self-examination taught her by worthy school-teachers, which, like a good child, she tries to put in practice once a week at least; but never a fault can she find, except that she loves reading story-books better than darning stockings, and prefers doing disagreeable things to-morrow rather than to-day. Nor can all the questions on the Ten Commandments enlighten her more as to her original wickedness, which is a great grievance to her, since she has been taught that to repent of one's sins is the first duty of a Christian; and how can one repent of what one cannot discover? She says the Lord's Prayer willingly, and trusts her trespasses will be forgiven, for she forgives everyone who injures her; but at the Penitential Psalms she stumbles, though she repeats them as a sacred duty, and tries in vain to think herself, with David and St. Paul, the chief of sinners. But in regard to this she may have patience, since it is a grievance that life will assuredly mend, and before the day of her death she will find occasion to chant more than one penitential psalm of her own in sadness and remorse. For she has the qualities of which saints and sinners alike are made, so that it may be an equal chance to her life's end which of the two she will turn out. Most likely, like many other daughters of Eve, she will hover on between the one and the other, not without many human doubts as to where the one begins and the other ends.

Her name is Elisabeth, which should be held another virtue in her, since Elisabeth is a name to be liked—soft-sounding, and royal and homely both. In stature she is of the middle height; in manner she is diffident and shy to the extreme verge of awkardness. She shuns the society of her kind, and loves to sit in a corner with her head in a romance. Some people think her absolutely stupid; one or two have told her that she is apathetic; and as she is of an age to have a blind trust in the opinion of others, she accepts these opinions resignedly. She is sure she is apathetic, and she supposes she must be stupid—which does not in the least, however, prevent her thinking herself extremely clever. But this is not altogether her fault, since she finds when she opens a book she has both wits

and brain to understand its meaning; and though she is sure she is apathetic, this does not prevent her having a great many wild and ardent imaginations about the world and what is going on in it. She has never travelled till now, and until the other day she did not suppose that she ever would. For though she is only seventeen, she has learned that life does not always correspond to our wishes, and that a large hopefulness often translates itself into a large discouragement. But it has entertained her to imagine the world as beautiful as she would like it to be, and a wonderful place it has lain in her imagination; for everything that is strange and unknown takes extraordinary value in her mind, like beads and glass among savages.

CHAPTER II.

A LOST PURSE.

To drop, then, the present tense, which is the less convenient to this narrative that the events it records happened some years ago, my heroine, Elisabeth Verrinder, was seated on board the Rhine boat one August day, watching the flowing river, gazing at the historic crags. For the river and the land were for her full of magic; an enchanted land, where the old guitar romance still came tinkling down through the ages, and Lorelei might still rise from the wave to sing when the air should cool and darken as the sun declined behind the mountain-tops. An enchanted land! As the boat glided onwards, Elisabeth—looking, looking with all her might—sat divided between ecstasy and pain. Here was such stuff as her dreams had been made of; here were vineyards, villages, ruins; here were boats laden with strange people putting off from the shore—people with unknown lives she could never know, appearing and vanishing again. And here, ah! here was a raft descending from what green haunted rustling forests of romance, bound for what far-off shadowy river-city of dreams. For ever as the parting stream rushed on either side of the boat, Elisabeth's thoughts followed it to where spires and towers and gables rose, set along an enchanted shore against the light of an enchanted sky. All poetry, all history, all the centuries, it seemed to her, were lying there, a mighty scroll ready to be unrolled if one had but

eyes and mind to read it. Ah! heavens, what ecstasy and what pain ; what ecstasy that so vast a spectacle should be lying there within one's grasp, as it were ; what pain that it should still elude one, if one is but a little dim-eyed, stammering school-girl in a brow stuff frock !

As Elisabeth half rose from her seat to watch the slow-receding raft, her book slipped from her knee to the deck of the steamer. Before she could stoop to pick it up, she was forestalled. "Allow me," said a gentleman, presenting it to her ; and this unoriginal remark at once recalled Elisabeth from her contemplation of the centuries, and introduced her, as it introduces the reader, to one of the most important personages of this history.

He was a man of about six-and-thirty, but with an appearance of ill-health that made him look older than his age ; his face was lined and worn, and of a sickly pallor ; his hair, as well as his short carefully trimmed beard and mustache was prematurely grizzled. He had an air of gravity and kindliness that befitted his clerical attire, his soft wide-brimmed felt hat, and long black coat reaching nearly to his heels. His voice was mild, and he smiled as he presented the book to Elisabeth, who received it covered with confusion. For the greater part of her seventeen years had been spent within the four walls of a boarding-school, strict almost as a convent ; and no dove-like novice, reared from infancy by pious nuns, could have a blanker ignorance of the world and its ways than had Elisabeth. To be spoken to by a stranger thrilled her with emotion ; such a thing had hardly ever happened to her before ; that the stranger should be a clergyman only tended to complicate the momentous situation. For in the secluded, half-conventual life that, through one cause and another, had closed around her until now, clergymen had not been altogether as other men to Elisabeth. In that intimate struggle to which allusion has been made, to establish the particular relation between herself and the visible world and the Invisible that she had been taught to regard as essential, a struggle which had formed no small part of her mental training so far, clergymen (together with the Prayer-book and expositions of the Church Catechism) had necessarily held a considerable place. They stood—that was how she had been taught to look at it ; and Elisabeth in those young days believed everything she was taught—where she vainly strove to stand in those baffled struggles of hers toward the Divine presence and light.

How should they be as other men? The mere supposition was illogical. Not a half-fledged curate among them but Elisabeth invested with something of distant awe and reverence—speaking in an abstract sense, it should be understood. For she was often sleepy in church, had no great taste for sermons, and knew a bad discourse from a good one as well as anybody. But this was an inconsistency that never disturbed her for a moment; probably, indeed, she was unconscious of it. Her mind was by nature receptive rather than critical; and when her mother-wit led her to criticise, she never found it out.

When her book, therefore, was presented to her by an unknown individual, whose dress and air proclaimed him to be a clergyman, Elisabeth could at first do nothing but color with embarrassment, but presently rallied sufficiently to utter a faltering "Thank you."

"You have lost your place, I am afraid," said the stranger. He spoke in a kind, grave voice which impressed Elisabeth, but also in some measure reassured her.

"Oh, that is no matter, thank you," she said, confusedly; "I have read the book before."

"It is no doubt, then, very amusing," said her interlocutor, with a smile. "May I see what it is? Ah, one of Miss Yonge's stories. Well, if you never read anything worse than Miss Yonge, you will do very well."

A pause before Elisabeth replied. "I have read Walter Scott," she said then, in rather a shamefaced way, "and one—one or two others."

"Ah, Walter Scott!—well," said the clergyman, folding his arms and stretching out his legs, "I have nothing to say against Walter Scott for young people. I believe him to be a very harmless writer. He has nothing in common with those pernicious novelists who do so much mischief in the present day."

Elisabeth looked down. She had never been allowed to read novels; but in the course of her nun-like existence she had read one or two, nevertheless. If she had a sin indeed on her conscience, it was this; and an honest heart impelled her to make the confession.

"I have read a few—novels, I mean," she said. "I didn't like one of them. I thought it was horrid."

"Ah, well, my dear," said the clergyman in his grave persuasive voice, "if you take my advice, you will let those things alone. Stories are all very well as a recre-

ation now and then for young people ; but no one is too young for the serious duties of life, and such books as I was speaking of just now can only lead to idleness or worse.

"I dare say," he continued in a moment, as Elisabeth did not answer, "that you have found that out yourself already. Young people, like elder ones, have their own duties to perform, though not such important ones, perhaps ; they have at least always the duty of learning to be good," he concluded, with a smile.

Elisabeth sat with downcast eyes, reddening with confusion ; and yet the sort of personal interest implied in these remarks filled her with extraordinary happiness. As she sat there beneath that serious and kindly eye, she felt she was an object of interest. Yes, this grave and reverend person, whose voice and manner indicated the greatest goodness and a habit of authority, certainly regarded her with interest.

"I—I don't know," she said, in rather a choked voice ; "I'm not very good, I know—I should like to be."

"Ah, well," said her companion kindly, "that is the first step, you know, and the last too. All our lives we have to go on liking to be good." Then, with a change of voice and manner : "You are not travelling alone, I suppose ? You have friends on board, have you not ?"

"I am alone now," said Elisabeth, in her shy, ill-considered manner ; "there was a lady who came with me as far as Bonn, and put me on board the boat this morning ; but she couldn't come any farther, and Aunt Maria—my aunt, you know—couldn't hear of anyone else just now, so she thought I might manage myself as far as Schlossberg. I'm going to school there ; I am not going to live at school, I'm going to live at a pension my aunt knows about ; but I am going to school every day to attend the classes."

A few more questions from her kindly interlocutor, and Elisabeth—in somewhat disjointed fashion, it is true—had confided to this new friend most of her young history. She was an orphan ; her parents had died when she was a child, so had her little brother ; and here Elisabeth's mouth quivered, and she turned away her face that it might not be seen that her eyes were full of tears. That little brother and playfellow—alas, alas ! He had died when she was eight years old. She had never spoken his name since ; but the thought of him, and the name of him,

could not come into her mind without a spasm at her throat and a rush of tears to her eyes. He had died, and she had been left alone. Not long afterwards nurse and governess had been sent away ; she had gone to a school at Richmond, and there she had remained ever since, until last midsummer, spending her holidays for the most part with her uncle and aunt in London. "And did she like London or Richmond best?" her companion inquired. Elisabeth, biting the end of her glove, didn't know. She had liked school best lately ; she had been one of the elder girls—almost the eldest. She had not liked it when she was little ; the others were not kind to her then, and she had been very unhappy, so that sometimes she had wished herself back with her aunt again. But she was not very happy there, either. Her uncle, Colonel Verrinder, was very kind to her always, but he was often ill, and she did not see very much of him. Her aunt— "I don't think Aunt Maria likes me much," said Elisabeth, looking down at her fingers.

"Well, that is perhaps a little your fault, eh ?" said the clergyman, in friendly tones ; "it generally is—isn't it ?—when people don't like us." Then, in compassion possibly for Elisabeth's reddening cheeks : "Have you any cousins ?" he required.

"No ; at home I am alone," said Elisabeth ; "but I don't mind that. I like being alone."

"And do you like coming abroad ?"

"Oh, yes !" said Elisabeth, with an immense breath—"better than anything in the world. I never thought I should come abroad."

"Why, how is that ?" said her companion ; "does your aunt never go abroad ?"

"Oh, yes, often ; but she has never taken me. It was because I should like it so much that I thought it would never happen. I never expect pleasant things to happen to me."

Her companion did not at once answer. To my heroine these ten minutes of confidence had been full of the most palpitating emotion. Elisabeth had long been an object of extreme interest to herself, but never before—never—had she been able to feel herself as she did now, of special interest to someone else. Naturally, the occasion was momentous. But to the clergyman these ten minutes had been merely such minutes of passing and kindly intercourse as he would have held with the first-comer in his parish.

That unimportant page in the world's history that called itself Elisabeth's life had not impressed him deeply, as, indeed, why should it? A page inscribed with fewer characters could hardly have been presented to him. The air blew somewhat chilly from the river, and rising, he wrapped a black and white plaid round his shoulders, and began to pace up and down the deck. He walked rather slowly and feebly, hardly lifting his feet from the ground. His movements, no less than the lines of suffering in his face, were those of an invalid. Elisabeth, sitting still in her place, watched him with an interest that entirely diverted her mind for the moment from the Rhine and the guitar romance of the ages. Presently he came and sat down again.

"You are going to Schlossberg," he said. "Perhaps, then, we may meet again later on. I expect to spend a good part of the winter there. I am ordered by my doctor to winter abroad."

"Oh, are you ill?" said Elisabeth, quickly and shyly.

"Not ill—only a little overworked," he answered; "and a thorough change has been recommended to me. So we may, perhaps, meet again. Not just at present, though, for I don't go to Schlossberg for some weeks, and I am going to land now at Bingen. You, I suppose, go on to Mayence."

"Yes," said Elisabeth; "I am to take the train there. I have it all written down, and my through-ticket, in my purse."

She put her hand into the pocket of her dress as she spoke, but withdrew it after a moment with an air of alarm. A little hand-bag stood on the bench at her side. She opened and searched it throughout, then felt again in her pocket with an ever-increasing expression of dismay. With an absolutely scared look at last, she turned to her companion:

"Oh!" she said, "I have lost my purse!"

He had not for the moment been attending to her. The boat was nearing Bingen, and he had been engaged in strapping up his rug. Now he turned round.

"Your purse?" he said. "Dear me, that is very awkward! Had you much money in it?"

"Everything," said Elisabeth, the tears in her eyes; "my through-ticket and everything. Oh, what am I to do?"

She made another desperate search in her pocket and bag, and under the adjacent chairs and benches, with the

same result as before. She looked up helplessly with falling tears, trying to check a sob.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said. "What will Aunt Maria say? She told me to be so careful of my purse and my keys, and I don't know what to do or how I am to get on."

"Perhaps you have dropped it somewhere on board," said her companion, with some attempt at consolation. "We will look about, and inquire whether it has been found."

They walked along the deck together, inquiring here and there, without success. At last Elisabeth stood still.

"I know now," she said, in a quavering voice, "where I must have lost it. The last time I had it was just before I got into the boat at Bonn. I paid the porter who had brought down my luggage. I thought I put it in my pocket again, but it must have slipped down the fold of my dress. I heard something fall, I remember; but there was a crowd, and we were in a hurry, and I was so sure it was safe——"

And here Elisabeth, breaking down altogether, turned away her head to hide the rush of her tears.

The boat was nearing Bingen; the passengers for that place were collecting their property, and Elisabeth's friend, with one hand on his travelling-bag, was giving a somewhat divided attention to her words. The steamer was close to the landing; in another minute it would stop.

"My dear," he said, "that was not very careful of you, was it? And now what can I do for you before I land? Shall I speak to the captain and ask him to look after you?"

"Oh," said Elisabeth, in dismay, "are you going to land? Are you going away? I don't know *what* I shall do. I have no ticket or anything."

"Do you mean you have no more money at all?" said the clergyman.

"No, none at all. The lady I was with paid my hotel bill last night, and Aunt Maria gave me my through-ticket and ten shillings besides. She said I shouldn't want any more just for feeing the porters, as I shall have no expenses after I get to Schlossberg. And now I have nothing left—nothing. It was all in my purse."

Her new acquaintance was silent for a minute; then slowly, with an air of deliberation, he drew out a pocket-book.

"I suppose," he said, with an air of rather severe kindness, that chilled the guilty Elisabeth to the heart, "the best thing will be for me to lend you some money to take you to your journey's end. You can return it to me when I come to Schlossberg, or I will write and let you know my address. Let me see, you will need your boat and train fare from Bonn to Schlossberg, I suppose, and a shilling or two extra for the porters. You will be careful of this, if I give it to you, will you not, my dear?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" said Elisabeth, trembling. "I am so sorry——"

"Well, well, it is your first journey, I suppose," said her companion, relenting a little. "You will learn by experience, no doubt. Now, let us see," he went on opening his pocket-book. "Dear, dear, I have no change, I see; none at all—only two marks, which will be of no use, and a hundred-mark note. What is to be done?"

"Can I get you some change?" said Elisabeth, wistfully. "I'll run and ask the captain."

"No, no," said the clergyman, with an air of vexation; "there is no time. I must go on shore at once, I see, if I don't wish to be left behind. My dear, if I trust this note to you, will you be very careful of it? You won't want it nearly all, you know. You had better get it changed at once, and put what you don't want in your bag."

"Yes, yes; oh, thank you!" said Elisabeth.

"And here is my card, with my name and English address—stop there, you fellow, what are you doing with my bag?—I must be off, my dear; I will write to you. What is your address at Schlossberg? Pension Elder—What is your name, by the bye?"

"Elisabeth Verrinder," she answered; and as her new acquaintance disappeared in the crowd on the little pier she looked down at the visiting-card she held, together with the hundred-mark bank-note in her hand.

"Rev^{d}· Robert Holland, The Vicarage, Thornton Briars," was what she read.

CHAPTER III.

A JOURNEY TOWARD THE UNKNOWN.

If an impression be left on the mind of the reader by the events recorded in the preceding chapter, that my heroine, because she was careless, was incapable, and helpless because she was diffident, I may at once hasten to remove it. Elisabeth, abandoned to her own resources, had as fair a capacity for making her way through the practical details and difficulties of life as most people. It is true she sometimes made mistakes, and had some skill, as has been seen, in losing her property ; but she was also endowed with a very sufficient spirit of energy, and a fear of being put in the wrong which so often passes for courage, that it may as well be written down as courage at once. Finding herself then, alone, with more on her hands in the way of arrangements for her journey than she had anticipated, she nevertheless comported herself after a discreet and creditable fashion. She changed her hundred-mark note, bought her tickets, and in due course found herself seated in the appointed train that was to bear her to the ancient town of Schlossberg. Her brief storm of difficulties was safely weathered ; she had forgotten then in a moment as the train sped onward to unknown regions through the warm August night, with the mild summer stars shining overhead. For the sun had sunk on this day, set in the midst of a million of days to stir one fresh eager young heart to rapture, and the night was thick with stars, though behind the hills a faint white light betrayed the near rising of the moon. Strange rapture of the unknown ! Elizabeth, leaning from her carriage window, tastes it to the full. Oh, heavens ! those lights shining for a moment from invisible lives, shining and disappearing again into the darkness as the train plunges onward through the night ; those solemn hills rising dimly against the solemn stars ; those breaths of an alien air, bearing brief snatches of an alien tongue ; and then the hollow thunder of a bridge, the gleam of a broad river, touched here and there with tremulous fires, with the darkling sky trembling down in quivering breadths of light. And before her all the time, that vaster, more mysterious Unknown, toward which the train is rushing to free her from a past informed, indeed,

with too little love, with too much sorrow and constraint for so young a thing. A diffident spirit, a lonely soul struggling among ideals, an affection too fastidious to be readily placed, and none of the sweet warmth and liberty and roughness of home at once to harden and console her —that had been her past. When at yesterday's dawn she rose to start on her journey her heart was beating high, not only with the joy common to all youthful hearts at the prospect of adventure and change, but with the larger joy of a sense of freedom, of escape from a life irksome to her as the round of a menagerie cage ; and though a tender-hearted child, she had felt hardly a pang on quitting the house that for ten years had been her home in name.

Since then two days have elapsed—two days of enchantment of a wide-opening world, of all the centuries crowding together to be a spectacle for her eager, all-devouring eyes ; and in the midst of the enchantment she has found a friend. Yes, she feels certain she has found a friend. Elisabeth, sitting at the carriage window, watching the sky grow whitely luminous and a strange clearness overspread the land as the moon rises above the summit of the hills, forgets again the procession of the centuries—she has never thought of them so much before—in this exquisit ecertainty that fills her heart. She has found a friend, and she is to meet him again—that is at least one thing clear in the midst of the dim uncertainties that lie before her ; and could her acquaintance of the afternoon have seen himself transfigured in the light that streamed on him from Elisabeth's mind, he might have been not ill-pleased, since no man that I know of objects to such transfiguring illumination ; he might not even have been surprised, since he had had some experience of the capacity of certain youthful minds for adoration ; but it is possible he might have been a trifle abashed. Nor if in the future he should fail to meet altogether the demands of Elisabeth's imagination, should it be laid wholly to his charge ; all the saints in the Roman calendar combined could hardly have satisfied those immense, those exorbitant claims.

The dreams of seventeen years are not, it may be held, of paramount utility to humanity at large ; but to the individual who dreams them they have an interest not to be exceeded, perhaps, by any other known exercise of the fancy. Ah, what a friend is this, thinks Elisabeth, that kindest fate has led across her path—a friend such as she has often longed for ; grave, of great goodness, and pro-

found ; awe-inspiring, too, yet of a kindness that at the worst may reassure one . . . interested in one, too, as her new acquaintance had been. This was the innocent conceit, this the exquisite vanity, that was filling Elisabeth's heart with bliss : that having, by help of kindest fate, met one who fulfilled every particular of her ideal—Elisabeth, with all her conscious cleverness, was not less hasty at conclusions than other young people of fewer wits—she should at once, as she felt, have gained a singular place in his interest and esteem. Here were dreams to occupy a heroine's mind and engage her fancy as the train sped onward through the wide green valleys beneath the broadening moonlight ; and to taste in its fulness that ineffable mingling of awe, reverence, admiration and vanity, one must surely be seventeen, and no less ignorant of the world than Elisabeth.

There is something so attractive—from certain points of view there is at least something so pathetic—in this youthful ignorance of the world and of self, that it seems a pity the dreams it engenders should, however innocent in themselves, be almost inevitably pernicious in their results. Elisabeth's were of a cloistered innocence that might have disarmed the most relentless destiny. They culminated in the conception that she might one day hear the Vicar of Thornton Briars' preach, and impart to him her personal impressions of his sermons. This conception did not mark the limits of Elisabeth's imagination in other directions ; that had a range altogether independent of her new friend ; but as she ran over in her mind the various excellences she had discerned in him that day, it seemed to her that life could hold no choicer benediction than to sit a disciple at his feet, and confide to him those thorny difficulties that interfered so sadly with the counsels of perfection she had been instructed to follow. Her mind slipped from this felicitous vision of the future to con over the hardly less felicitous incidents of the immediate past. How kind he had been, her meditations ran, what goodness in his look ; how generous in action, how prompt to help her. She opened her bag and counted her money for the third or fourth time, to make sure it was all right. She had not spent so very much of it—not more, she thought, than she could replace in a few weeks out of her allowance of pocket-money ; and if not, he was so good that he would not mind if she returned him all that remained, and asked him to wait a little for the rest. She was almost glad now that

she had lost her purse ; otherwise she might have seen but little of Mr. Holland, after all. But now he had said that he would write to her ; she would have to write to him. Some intercourse between them there must necessarily be.

And meanwhile, as these thoughts, in the strangest medley of past, present, and future, are coursing through Elisabeth's brain, the train, speeding onward, is bringing her to Schlossberg and all that the fates hold hidden for her there. Some three hours of railway had lain between the Rhine steamer and her final destination, but there had been some detention on the line. The night was well advanced toward midnight, and a full moon was shining down out of cloudless blue upon the ancient castle, the gabled roofs, the hills and vineyards and river of Schlossberg, when, with a final shriek, the train drew into the lighted station, and Elisabeth's journey was at an end.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ENCHANTED NIGHT.

Elisabeth's *carte-de-voyage* had been made out with great precision before she left England. Not a loophole for adventure had apparently been left. The hours for departure, arrival, trains, boat, hotel, pension—all had been arranged beforehand with such detail as a careful, if not too affectionate aunt might think needful for a young niece starting forth into an unknown world. She had shaken her head, indeed, at that absence of an escort on the boat and railway journey from Bonn to Schlossberg ; but, after all, Elisabeth was only a child ; and a silent, shy, backward girl like herself was not likely to get into mischief. In short, and finally, it could not be helped. Mrs. Verrinder was about to start with her husband on a round of autumn visits ; it was convenient to despatch Elisabeth at that particular time, and at no other—there was nothing else to be done.

Mrs. Verrinder's confidence in her niece was not ill-founded, though in spite of precautions, Elisabeth, as we know, had contrived to secure to herself at least one adventure—one, indeed, of dimensions quite undreamed of by her as yet. But that safely tided over for the moment, her way lay plain before her. Her destination

was a certain pension kept by an elderly English lady, who in former years had been her aunt's governess, and in whom Mrs. Verrinder, as she herself frequently remarked, had every confidence. With her Elisabeth was to board, more as a pupil and as a personal charge than as an ordinary member of the pension; and attending her school-classes every day, would, a careful aunt might readily suppose, live through her twelvemonth abroad with no less propriety, and scarcely less dulness, than under Mrs. Verrinder's own eye.

All this Elisabeth knew beforehand, and it certainly demanded an imagination no less lively than her own to weave any possible romance out of such prosaic elements. Elisabeth, however, had an imagination equal to almost any emergency, and the mere fact of coming abroad was so wonderful to her that it seemed probable life would henceforward become a sort of transformation-scene that might be expected to become permanent at its most brilliant moment. Had not, in fact, the shifting of the scenes begun even now? Already, before the train had reached the station, Elisabeth was on her feet, collecting her cloak, her umbrella, and her hand-bag; and hardly had it stopped than she had sprung out and was looking about her with eager eyes. She was in search of an elderly Englishwoman, housekeeper at the pension for which she was bound, who would meet her at the Schlossberg station, her aunt had been assured beforehand, and at once take charge of the young traveller. A description of Elisabeth, precise as that demanded by a passport in bygone days, had been forwarded, not omitting the brown frock and brown straw hat, and she had no reasonable fear of being missed. She stood quietly then for a minute to allow the passengers to disperse, looking about her on every side; then, as no one approached her, moved forward a few steps, to retreat shyly again to her former position.

The station meanwhile was fast emptying; one and another party had greeted their friends and vanished; the train, after its brief delay, had disappeared with a shriek into the moonlit darkness; a porter began to turn down the lights; still no one came near Elisabeth as she stood lonely on the platform. She could stand there no longer. Half frightened, she gave up her ticket, passed through the door of exit, and found herself alone in the booking-office outside.

The station-master, observant of the solitary figure who stood as though doubtful what to do, came up and addressed her.

"The Fraulein is perhaps waiting for someone?" he said.

"I was expecting someone," said Elisabeth, in her school-girl German; "but she hasn't come. There is some mistake, I suppose. What had I better do?"

"You have some luggage, perhaps?" said the man. "Have you far to go?"

"I don't know—to the Pension Elder, 102, Bergstrasse," said Elisabeth. "I have some luggage. Hadn't I better have a carriage?"

The man opened the entry door and looked out.

"The carriages are all gone," he said. "This is the last train, and it is late. But it is not very far to walk," he went on, as Elisabeth looked at him in some dismay. "A porter can take your luggage on a truck and show you the way."

"Oh, thank you; yes, that will do," said Elisabeth; and five minutes later, with her box rolling on a truck in front, under the charge of guide and porter in one, she had left the station behind her, and was making her way through the town of Schlossberg.

The town? An enchanted city opening before her eyes as she walked onward with her guide. It was close upon midnight; the streets were empty; their footsteps echoed as they passed along. The full moon shone clear overhead, white and intense in the largeness of the vacant sky, transfiguring every wall and gable, building up, as it were, streets of whitest marble under the wide heaven of blue. Hardly a lamp was burning in those light-flooded streets; but here and there in some high-set window a yellow spark that told of human life added to the remote enchantment of the hour. And, hark! higher still, up in mid-air, a clock chimes four quarters above the sleeping city, a deep-toned bell slowly tells the midnight hour, and as it dies away another and another swings on the vibrating air, down from strange towers that rise against the sky, into Elisabeth's very soul. Now and then a belated figure, with shadow strangely shrunk in the broad moonlight, hurries by; a brief shout of laughter (what strange laughter, what goblin shadows!) echoes round some corner; then silence falls again. Our wayfarer, with the eager eyes, the overflowing heart, seems to herself alone in that enchanted world.

To every mortal with eyes to see and heart to compre-

hend, such magic city rises once in life; then vanishes, never to return. But to Elisabeth, with the cup of rapture at her lips, drinking with the insatiable thirst of her seventeen years, that cup seemed deeper than the ocean, wider than all heaven and earth, a cup to brim over to the end of life. Could she have had her will, that walk through the enchanted night would hardly have known an end. But, alas! these were but the streets of Schlossberg she was treading; that guide in front of her, looking back now and again to make sure that she was following, was but a railway-porter with a trunk; and presently, midway down a wide and well-paved street, he paused in front of a door surmounting a flight of some three or four stone steps. The street was empty and echoing like the others, and the moonlight, falling full on the house, showed a blank and shuttered front. It was a large and handsome building, but from roof to basement not a sign showed that any traveller ever had been or could be expected there. But that "Pension Elder" showed in black letters on a glittering door-plate, Elisabeth would have thought there must be some mistake.

"Please, will you ring?" she said, in faltering accents. "I do hope everyone is not in bed."

The man rang and waited. The shadows fell back across the white pavement; some city clock overhead chimed out the half-quarter. As the sound died away the man rang again, a louder peal. Elisabeth, standing there, began to feel frightened and forlorn. She was tired, she was hungry, she remembered that she was all alone in the heart of a strange city.

A footstep audible within at last, a bolt withdrawn, a yellow gleam visible within a cautiously opened door.

"Who is it?" said a female voice.

"Am I not expected?" said Elisabeth, running up the steps.

The door opened wider, and a dishevelled, sleepy maid-servant appeared. She looked at Elisabeth, she looked at her trunk, and a gleam of intelligence showed itself in her face.

"You can't come in," she said; "but if you'll wait I'll call the Englishwoman."

She disappeared, and five minutes later an elderly woman, whose hasty toilet had still an air of neatness, appeared descending the staircase, lamp in hand, and approached Elisabeth.

"I'm sorry, miss, I'm sure," she said at once. "You were expected here this evening, perhaps?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" said Elisabeth, opening her eyes. "Wasn't it you who were to have met me at the station?"

"Well, miss, I dare say it was, though I heard nothing of it. You see, we're in sad trouble here. My poor mistress died quite suddenly yesterday morning, and the house is shut up."

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, in dismay, "what shall I do? I was to have come here. I have nowhere else to go."

"Well, I'm sorry, miss, I'm sure," the woman said again; "but I couldn't take you in—not to make you comfortable. We might just give you a bed; but the funeral's the first thing to-morrow morning, and altogether I couldn't advise it. We had only one family in, as it happened, and they left at once."

"Oh, no, I couldn't come," said Elisabeth, shrinking back at the mention of the funeral. The news of this unknown death caused her no especial emotion, nor was her informant's impassive manner calculated to induce any. "Only I don't know what to do," she said again, rather piteously.

"Well, miss, if I were you I should just go to an hotel for the night, and to-morrow you'll see. You have friends, I dare say, in Schlossberg."

"No, oh no!" said Elisabeth. "I was to have stayed with Miss Elder; I don't know anyone else."

"Then, miss, you'll have to write to your friends in England and just tell them how it is, and for to-night you'd best go to the Kaiserhof. It's close by here, in the Platz at the end of this street. You'll find it open yet, for it's the biggest hotel here, and there's always a night-porter on hand. I'm sorry, I'm sure, it's happened so; but you see how it is, miss, and I shall be leaving myself to-morrow after the funeral. You just take this young lady to the Kaiserhof," the woman went on, addressing the porter in German; and the next minute Elisabeth once more found herself following her guide down the moonlit street. Another minute and a wide Place opened on her view; trees were planted round and cast spreading black shadows on the wide and empty pavement; in the centre was the tranquil plash of running water; opposite, the word "Kaiserhof" glittered in the moonlight across a wide hotel front. Elisabeth's heart, which had sunk for a moment, bounded up again in ecstasy. An exulting sense of freedom and adventure took possession of her. She forgot

fatigue, she forgot hunger; she only felt that she was free.

The hotel was hushed and sleeping, but the night-porter was at his post, and no difficulty was made in giving Elisabeth a room. Nay, when, on being asked if she were in want of anything, she ventured diffidently to inquire whether she could have something to eat, a little supper-tray was immediately conveyed to her bedroom. No fairy-tale adventure could have seemed more complete to Elisabeth. Left to herself, she surveyed her new domain with rapture. To her inexperienced eyes, accustomed only to the bare school dormitory, the simple furniture of the little room she called her own in her uncle's house, this ordinary hotel apartment, with its Utrecht velvet chairs and sofa, its polished floor and mahogany writing-table, its tall gilt candlesticks and clock, seemed of palatial splendor. She opened her window and stood gazing out; opposite to her, above the trees in the Place, rose steep antique roofs, pierced with rows of dormer windows that glittered in the moonlight; beyond, a church tower was outlined against the luminous sky; beyond all rose the darkness of the forest-covered hills. Long did Elisabeth stand gazing out, invaded, surrounded, intoxicated by a sense of freedom, of eternal emancipation. How could the old life begin again? It never could—never. The tears rushed to her eyes; she stretched out both arms to the silence, the moonlight, the placid air; a hundred emotions were stirring in her heart, awakened she knew not how.

She turned away with a sigh at last, but not to sleep. Two candles stood burning on the writing-table, luxury unknown to a school-girl life. She pulled out her little diary, and sat scribbling the records of these unimagined joys, until long after every clock in the city had chimed out the hour of two in the August morning.

CHAPTER V.

HOW MR. HOLLAND ONCE COURTED NEMESIS.

While Elisabeth was thus pursuing her unexpectedly adventurous course to unlooked-for ends, her companion on the Rhine boat, who had occupied so many of her thoughts during the day, was passing his hours in the more sober and serious fashion proper to his character and to his position in life.

The Reverend Robert Holland, Vicar of Thornton Briars, a somewhat remote and widely-scattered parish in one of the southern counties, was, like Elisabeth, making his first essay in Continental travel (he had been abroad before, but only on rapid railway journeys to and from a given spot); but the impression made on each by this fresh experience differed by more than the difference represented by the years between seventeen and thirty-six. To Mr. Holland, in common with most men who have reached middle-age, the practical side of life presented at once sufficient interest and a sufficient number of complications to engage most of his attention; but apart from this, he was at no time a person of very lively imagination; the Continent presented to him no boundless vista of infinite possibilities; and his journey, made strictly in obedience to the doctor's orders, had been undertaken sorely against his will. So far, the inconveniences and annoyances of this compulsory exile—the foreign tongues (he spoke no language but his own), the details of travel, the fatigues, the expenses—more than counteracted any possible pleasure an unimaginative, midde-aged man, educated but not cultivated, could be expected to find in the sight of ruins, however attractive, and the echoes of a guitar romance. The centuries, which Elisabeth found so absorbing, had nothing to say to him at all. Schlossberg was the final goal of his journey; for rest and change of scene being what he needed rather than change of climate, he had chosen that town with a view to renewing a friendship of some standing with the clergyman who officiated there as resident English chaplain. Other ties Mr. Holland had there also; but these he held to be of a nature to repel rather than to invite him—so much so, that the fact had suspended his decision for a while, when he was consider-

ing the question of a winter residence. But a lonely man in broken health is too dependent on others for absolute freedom of decision ; and a letter from his friend urging the claims of Schlossberg, arriving at the critical moment, finally decided him in its favor. It was, however, to be his winter residence only. Some weeks at one of the German baths had been recommended to him in the first instance ; and he was on his way now to Schwalbach, stopping at Bingen for a night *en route* to see a half-brother who had lately married, and was residing on an estate in the immediate neighborhood of that town.

Mr. Holland, then, keeping his portmanteau well in view with the nervousness common to inexperienced travellers, directed his steps to one of the town hotels, and presently found himself installed in a small apartment looking out on a back courtyard. The room showed little of that luxury that was to dazzle Elisabeth in her apartment of splendor only a few hours later. Mr. Holland was a man of plain tastes who held economical views of life. He had selected his hotel beforehand from Baedeker's list, with a regard to strict economy, and had not failed, before allowing his portmanteau to be carried upstairs, to enter into a narrow inquiry as to prices with the landlord. For it was the misfortune of this country vicar to have come abroad with the rooted conviction that the foreign world was in a conspiracy to cheat him, and that a frugal man should not only consider every penny twice before spending it, but, so far as possible, carefully reduce that penny to a halfpenny before spending it at all. It was the lesson he had taken most to heart in studying his guide-book, that treated with equal impartiality and indifference the prices of hotels and the architecture of cathedrals, the fees of cicerones and the history of art. For the mind, as we all know, finds what it seeks, and discovers what it brings ; and it was the idiosyncrasy of the Vicar of Thornton Briars to bring the consideration of shillings and pence to bear upon very various subjects, and to find the troublesome problems connected with them start up at most of the corners he turned in life. He had, to speak plainly—it may as well be stated first as last—that inveterate dislike to parting with his money that must surely occasion a man a good deal of unnecessary annoyance, and which has the drawback, moreover, of not infrequently placing him at a greater disadvantage than much worse sins would do. In Mr. Holland the dislike

arose from some curiously contradictory causes that can be understood only through a brief survey of his previous life.

It was in the blind court of a back street in Derby that Robert Holland, some six-and-thirty years before this history commences, first saw the light. His father, Captain Holland, attached to a regiment then quartered at Derby, had committed the unoriginal folly of falling in love with the simple and pretty graces of a little nursery governess. The nursery governess, he presently discovered, was the daughter of a fierce little Dissenting minister, who officiated at a small chapel up a back lane; and urged partly by affection, partly by fear of a possible scandal and uproar, Captain Holland married the young girl. He was a man of good birth and excellent connections; but he was a younger son without prospects, and the habit of a man in his position, of spending a good deal more money than he possessed; when, therefore, he had got his wife he had not an idea what to do with her. The only thing that occurred to him was to stipulate that the marriage should be kept secret for the present; and a month later, his regiment being ordered to Ireland, to leave her behind in the care of her parents. Captain Holland was a handsome, easy-going young fellow; he assured himself, without any attempt at evasion, that he had made a huge blunder and committed the greatest folly in the world; but he preserved his cheerfulness, and had no idea of not making himself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. He arranged a small allowance for his wife, wrote to her occasionally, and during the months that followed thought little more about her. At the end of those months a letter arrived from the Dissenting minister, informing him of the birth of a son and the death of his wife. Captain Holland was as much taken aback as it was in his nature to be; for the poor girl, partly through timidity, partly through a dull resentment at the treatment she had received, had concealed the expected birth of her child. Captain Holland obtained leave of absence, and arrived at Derby with an air of indignation at the deceit that had been practised that effectually masked any grief or remorse he might feel. He visited his wife's grave and ordered a tombstone; at the baby he hardly glanced, but desired it should remain with its grandparents, fixing an allowance sufficient for its maintenance; and so departed rejoicing in the knowledge that, but for that slight tax of

some eighty pounds a year, he was once more a free man.

That was how Robert Holland came into the world.

The child grew up with his grandparents in the back lane leading out of a Derby street, and knew no other life. He was aware of his father's existence, but that was all. Some five or six years after his first wife's death, Captain Holland married again; a more splendid alliance this time, with a young Austrian girl of rank and fortune. He left the army and settled in Vienna—he had a sister there, married to Richard Temple, partner in, and representative in that city of, the great banking house of Temple & Temple; their infant son, Gordon, was being rejoiced over at the epoch of the marriage, as heir to immense wealth. They held a brilliant position, and it was at their house Captain Holland first met his bride. He settled in Vienna, and a son and daughter being presently born to him, the existence of his eldest son came into his head not oftener, perhaps, than twice a year. It was his eldest son; but the words have little significance to a man of Captain Holland's stamp, when there is no money to leave or to be inherited; and all Captain Holland's present wealth came from his second wife, and would necessarily go to her children. The boy's allowance was paid through his lawyer; there was nothing further to remind him of the Derby back lane and the most uncomfortable passage of his life. Little Robert, meanwhile, grew up not unhappily. As soon as he was old enough, he was sent to the chapel school, and even before that was taken to the chapel pew, where he saw and heard with awe his grandfather fulminating strange doctrines above his head. The child took kindly to the life; he was the pattern boy at school, was allowed to sit up at chapel tea-drinkings, and presently, after going through unknown terrors at such awful visions of hell as were suggested by his hymn-book and his grandfather's sermons, began to blossom into infant piety. He put his rare pennies into the missionary box, alternately with the money box in which his grandmother instructed him to keep his savings; since money was meant to be kept by little boys, not spent, except for the poor heathen. He read biographies of pious children who had died young, much to their own content (he would have liked a pious death-bed himself, if he could have read his own biography afterward); and presently he himself began to have ex-

periences which he detailed, to the edification and wonder of the petty tradesmen's wives who attended the Shoe Lane Bethel, and drank tea at the house of the minister. There was no affectation in all this on the boy's part ; he accepted everything he was taught with intense conviction, and grew up by degrees an intelligent, though rather slow-witted lad, mild in manner, but with a tenacious will and domineering temper that made itself felt among his schoolmates. Little Robert worshipped his grandfather, and believed everything he said with an implicit faith. By the time he was eight years old he desired nothing better than to tread in the old man's footsteps and occupy in his turn the Shoe Lane pulpit.

Such, in fact, might possibly have been the destiny of Captain Holland's eldest son, but for the death, when he was about twelve years old, of his other grandfather, Sir Mark Holland, of whom he had never even heard. Captain Holland's eldest brother Arthur, succeeding to the title and estates, bethought him to look into the family affairs, and presently called to mind his half-forgotten nephew. (Captain Holland had made no secret of his first marriage as time went on, but had spoken of the boy vaguely, as living with his grandparents and getting a sound English education.) The new baronet had half a dozen children of his own, and no special interest in the boy ; but he had always disapproved of his younger brother, and it occurred to him now, as head of the family, to consider it a scandal that one of its members, bearing the family name, should be living neglected in a back lane. He ascertained the boy's address at Derby, and went to hunt him up ; with the ultimate result, when various letters had passed between the heads of the family —Captain Holland was surprised, he wrote, to hear of his son in jacket and trousers ; he had figured him as still in petticoats—that young Robert was put in the way of a more liberal education by being placed at a good grammar school. He was still to spend his holidays in Shoe Lane ; for that his grandfather had stipulated ; but that did not preclude an occasional visit to his uncle's country house. Sir Arthur disliked his nephew as much as it was possible to dislike anyone so mild and inoffensive ; for the lad revealed by degrees two qualities, an obstinate narrowness of vi[illegible] and a love of saving that the baronet held to be wholly at variance with the more generous traditions of an English gentleman. Of the first the

boy was unconscious; the second he had been taught to regard as a virtue—was proud of it, indeed, until presently, perceiving that his frugal mind brought him no repute among his school-fellows, he learned to hold his tongue, and incurred no more unpopularity and reproach than always attends a niggard among prodigals. With his uncle he gained but little ground, and none the more for a declaration made early in their acquaintance, that he would be neither soldier nor sailor, would study neither physic nor the law, and knew no ambition in life but that of inheriting his grandfather's pulpit in Shoe Lane. Nothing could be more remote from Sir Arthur's intention than that his nephew, whom he had, as he hyperbolically expressed it in moments of disgust, picked out of a back lane gutter, should sink into a petty Dissenting minister; but finding the boy's religious convictions, of whatever kind, sincere, and his will of unequalled pertinacity, he presently destined him in his own mind for the Church. There was a family living that must some day fall vacant; meanwhile he could go to Oxford. The boy himself, as time went on, began, under new influences, to swerve in his allegiance to Little Bethel. Each succeeding holiday the house in Shoe Lane seemed narrower, more penurious, less acceptable to the expanding youth; by the time he was seventeen he fell not far short of being ashamed of it. This feeling was accentuated to an extraordinary degree by a visit that he at last paid his father in Vienna during a long vacation.

The visit, it may be said at once, did the young man no good. His father's wealth, in which he could never have a share; the luxury, or so it seemed to him, not only in his father's house, but in that of those other unknown relations of whom till now he had hardly heard—his aunt, his uncle, his cousin, Gordon Temple; the wide difference between himself and the brother and sister, seen now for the first time; all these things swelled the young fellow's heart with a strange perplexing complication of feelings. Before half the term fixed for his visit had expired, he left abruptly; he returned straight to Shoe Lane, and stayed there for the remainder of the vacation. The dull fire of a fanatical egotism was kindled in his breast; that was the next phase in young Holland's development. He was filled with anger at the contrast between his kindred's wealth and the poverty of his own lot; and yet he triumphed in that poverty as a distinction that, setting

him above the world, placed him in the direct favor of God. When in the first weeks after his arrival he was requested, as he had been requested before—his gifts of piety and eloquence being known—to address a meeting, he chose as the text of his discourse, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." He spoke with the fire of conviction, but it was the last address Robert Holland ever delivered in Shoe Lane. The final result of his visit to Vienna presently showed itself in a strong reaction against some of the more sacred traditions of his early life ; in his second year at Oxford he associated himself, as a young man destined for the Church, with the extreme High Church party. In after years he somewhat modified his views in this direction, as the milder side of his nature taught him tolerance ; but the reaction remained complete. All that now was left of his early training in religious matters was a hard and narrow strenuousness of aim, differing not in degree, but in some indefinable quality—a certain commonness of imagination, perhaps—from that of his new associates. He was no more popular at Oxford than he had been at school ; and he himself came by degrees to an uneasy consciousness of something wrong. Confronted by the large and easy life of his contemporaries, he somehow found himself wanting. He took refuge as before in disapproval, which was easy enough ; but he felt the taint of Shoe Lane clinging to him—that was what it was ! Before the years of his residence at Oxford had expired, he had resolved to break, as much as possible, with his old associations ; and his grandfather dying the year he was ordained, the resolution was the less difficult to keep.

The old grandmother was now his only link with Shoe Lane. He went to see her once or twice, but he never mentioned her existence. Definitively he was ashamed of his earlier years. The old woman did not long survive her husband ; her grandson was with her to soothe her death-bed, and an hour or two before she died she handed over to him her savings—nearly fifty pounds—sewn up in an old stuff pocket. Holland was at this time a hard-working London curate, with every confidence in his vocation, and no prevision of an approaching catastrophe that in one way or another was to influence his life to the very end. His father had died whilst he was still at Oxford, and for a long time he had little intercourse with his relations in Vienna. But in the second year of his curacy an

intimation reached him of his half-sister Emilia's approaching marriage with Count Karl von Waldorf—she was at that time about eighteen, a young girl of great beauty and distinction—and an invitation to be present at the wedding.

Robert Holland's first impulse was to refuse. What had he, a hard-working parish priest, to do with people such as those? His next step was to accept. An overmastering desire had seized him to see and taste and share again in all those things that might have been his own portion—that was what he had taught himself to believe—had his father dealt justly by him. He went; he remained nearly a month, and came back maddened by an immense craving, an immense resentment. He came back to his sordid London lodging, his untidy landlady, his ill-cooked, ill served meals. It was not that he had ever greatly minded these things in themselves; he had no fine discrimination, and much indifference to personal comfort. It might be a truer statement that these things and his personal comfort had little to say to each other; the simplest luxury procured by a call upon his purse had always seemed to him too dearly bought. But he was only five-and-twenty; he had the blood of his pleasure-loving father in his veins, as well as that of the old grandmother who had taught him practically that money was the chief good; and below all, as has been said, lay an immense resentment. There were times during these months that followed when Holland, tired out by a hard day's work, was not far from declaring that he was ready to sell his soul to the devil for a fortune; and presently he went nearly as far in that direction as the degenerate resources of modern civilization will allow. The devil has no great originality of device, one is sometimes tempted to think; he led the young fellow, at any rate, a way that he has led many a young fellow before him. He induced him to lay hands on certain funds to which he had access, belonging to a parish charity, and embark with them in a speculation that on a certain day was to land him in the midst of wealth.

It landed him penniless, with the empty cashbox before him, that he had now no means of replenishing; and the discovery, that could in no case have been long delayed, was made by accident some twenty-four hours later. The facts of the case, however, were suppressed, so far as the public was concerned, as much as possible. A vague

scandal, indeed, spread through the parish among such as occupied themselves with Church matters, of the misappropriation, or worse, of certain funds ; but the money, it was further rumored, was repaid almost immediately, which threw a kind of doubt upon the whole story. Nevertheless, it trickled down here and there, making a deposit in one or two minds it was never meant to reach. That is a kind of Nemesis that seldom fails to wait upon scandals of the sort, and it was not wanting in Robert Holland's case. But in general the details were known only to the few more immediately concerned, and though he left the parish not long afterward to take a curacy in the North of England, the scandal, so far as he knew, was not directly associated with his name. His rector was a just and a merciful man. Something he had seen and understood of the morbid, unsettled state of mind his curate had brought back with him from Vienna. He valued him as one of the best and most indefatigable workers he had ever had to do with, and though the discovery of his ill-doing was a shock, he saw no need to ruin a young man at the outset of life for what, he had no doubt, was a moment's aberration. He could not keep him in the parish —if the story had, in fact, got abroad, the scandal would have been too great—but he sent him to an old friend holding a living in a North-Country manufacturing district, stating the case, and yet recommending him as a man capable of a larger amount of good work than most men, and as likely as most men, the past notwithstanding, to lead an upright, conscientious life. The event sufficiently justified him. The shock had sobered the young fellow once for all ; he was terror stricken ; he was stung by remorse. More than that, within the limits of his nature—a man can be no more—he was deeply penitent. Those past months represented for him the "Sturm und Drang" period of his youth, its sorry crop of wild oats, its sad and evil romance. Henceforward he settled down with a steadiness to the best work his life was to know.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HOLLAND'S HISTORY CONTINUED.

His character did not change, since character never changes; it only narrowed and developed itself along certain lines. His communications with Germany became scantier as time went by. That was by his own desire; he had no wish for closer relations with that prosperous branch of his family. The eye he turned in that direction never shone with a friendlier light than at first; on the contrary, it became cloudier with a complication of feelings he ceased to analyze, but which translated themselves easily enough, and not too offensively to himself, by the word disapproval. One member of his family, however, Mr. Holland came to regard with some kindliness—the kindliness that springs from services asked and rendered—and that was his half-brother Otto. The boy, by his father's desire, was educated entirely in England; but Robert Holland's first acquaintance with him dated from the journey they made together to Vienna on the occasion of Emilia Holland's marriage. Otto, a handsome scapegrace some three years younger than his sister, was at that period trying the patience of his masters at Eton; and not long after their return to England his half-brother, who was then still in London revolving those desperate thoughts we know of, received a letter from his young relative entreating him to come and help him out of an awful scrape. The boy was in a scrape, no doubt; and in mortal terror of its coming to the ears of his guardian, Sir Arthur Holland, he had applied to his half-brother for help. Not that he very much liked him; no young fellow ever thoroughly liked Robert Holland; still, he seemed a good enough sort of chap, and being a parson, ought to know how to pull him through. Robert went down to Eton, and did pull him through, to the boy's lasting gratitude. Afterward, when he left Eton and went to Oxford, he still saw his elder brother from time to time, and an odd sort of liking grew up between the two; not thoroughly cordial on either side, but with the kind of familiarity without intimacy that can only exist between near relations. They continued to keep up an intermittent intercourse, and it was through him that Mr. Holland learnt the two

events that principally affected his family in the following years : the death of his stepmother at Vienna, and that of his sister's husband, Count von Waldorf, killed by a fall from his horse some six or seven years after their marriage.

These things did not affect him greatly; it was not to be expected that they should: he was more closely touched by the death of a lady to whom he became engaged during the last year of his curacy in the North of England. She had been a plain little woman, some years his senior, with a boundless capacity for devotion to himself. Mr. Holland, however, was not unused to devotion from the female portion of his flock ; it was an incense, he had found, that always burned freely enough ; and he had been more influenced, perhaps, in his choice of a wife by the fact that this plain little woman was an heiress in her way, with some three or four hundred a year of her own. That loss of an easy prospect for the future was a terrible blow to our curate, mingled as it was with a certain tenderness and affection for the poor little woman herself. He was only beginning to rally, when the presentation of the family living of Thornton Briars set his mind once more at rest for the future. It was a living of some value, though Mr. Holland privately found a good deal to reprehend in the injustice of fate that had made him vicar instead of rector. His uncle, it may be observed in passing, had known nothing of that early backsliding of his nephew—that strange, that almost impossible episode, as it now appeared to Robert Holland himself. There had been nothing, there had been no one, to remind him of it for these seven years past ; he had banished it from his thoughts, as far as possible from his memory. He thought, in fact, very well of himself at this time, better than of most people, and found no reason to do otherwise. The people he worked among thought well of him ; he loved his work, and was greatly beloved by many of his parishioners. He had the habit of authority, of exhortation, of rebuke ; these things create a second life for a man that lies quite apart from that other life in which he owns himself a miserable sinner, and may end by leaving it far behind. He had the excellent fortune, too, of a field of labor altogether congenial to him, and one exactly suited to his powers. He ended, however, by over-taxing his powers. Three years after the day on which he took possession of the vicarage of Thornton Briars, his health broke down, and he was driven abroad, as we have seen.

Such, in imperfect outline, had been the past history of the Reverend Robert Holland, whom, after his day on board the Rhine boat—to resume our narrative at the point where it was dropped—we have seen preparing, in somewhat sorry fashion, to take his ease in his inn at Bingen.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HOLLAND'S CORRESPONDENCE.

Having arranged matters, then, with his landlord on the basis already indicated, and proved that he was not a man to be imposed upon, Mr. Holland presently partook of a modest supper in the hotel coffee-room, and thence retired to the solitude of the little chamber that had been assigned to him on an upper floor. A packet of letters lay awaiting him on the table, for he had directed his correspondence to be forwarded to his hotel. He turned them over one by one, with no great sign of pleasure or expectation as he recognized the handwriting on each; and laying them down again to await his leisure, he opened his portmanteau and began slowly (all his movements were slow) to exchange his boots for slippers, his travelling coat for a looser garment. Then pulling an armchair forward to the table, whence the frugal light of a single candle dismally shone on the room, he placed himself in it with an air of fatigue, and took up the letters once more. Three of them bore the postmark of his English parish; a fourth had a German stamp. Mr. Holland drew the candle closer to him, and proceeded to examine their contents.

The first he opened was from the curate left in charge of his parish; the second was from one of his churchwardens: he glanced at them, and threw them on one side with a gesture of impatience. It had cost him a cruel pang to hand over the parish and his work to other hands; but the pang accomplished, he found an indescribable weariness in the thought of shouldering the burthen of business again. He took up the third letter, which also bore the Thornton Briars postmark; and this he perused with something more of attention. It was from a young parishioner, the daughter of the village doctor, whom Mr. Holland had been lately engaged in preparing for Confirmation. It ran as follows in a slim, facile handwriting:

"DEAR MR. HOLLAND:—When I came back from my aunt's last week, I found you were already gone. I cannot tell you how sorry I was; I sat down and cried for half an hour. I did so hope to see you again, and to wish you good-by. I wanted to tell you how often I should think of you, and of all that you have said to me; but as I couldn't see you, I write as you bade me. I am sure you know—do you not, dear Mr. Holland? that I do wish to do what you think right; but it will be so much harder now you are gone away, and there is no one for me to talk to. I have done as you advised, and taken a class at the Sunday-school while I am at home for the holidays; Mr. Richards offered to help me about it on Sunday, but that was not the same thing as having you at all. Still, I don't think I really did badly. Maria Wright's boys—she has the class next to mine, you know—were not half so attentive as mine; but I know that was only because I was thinking all the while of you, and trying to fancy you were there. I could cry now to think that you were not, and will not be for such a long time to come. Do get well soon, dear Mr. Holland, and come home again. I am going to learn to do a great deal of parish work by the time you return, so as to be able to help you more. You know it is what I *really* care most about, though I know it is my duty to give some of my time to other things I do not like nearly so well. I don't think anything can be so interesting as poor people, and trying to do them good, do you? Perhaps when you return you will let me go about with you a little and hear what you say to them: there is no one so good as you are. Do get well and come back soon, dear Mr. Holland.

"Your affectionate
"DULCIE FAWCETT."

It was with a half-smile, smoothing down his mustache the while with one finger, that Mr. Holland read this effusion from his youthful parishioner. He laid it down, and took up the fourth letter, one altogether different from its companions. It bore the Schlossberg postmark; the address, in a clear and beautiful handwriting, was on fine, delicately scented paper, and the fastening of the envelope bore a stamped coronet. Mr. Holland turned it over once or twice before opening it, not because he had any doubt as to who the writer might be—the letter, as he was well aware, was from his half-sister, Emilia von Waldorf—but

because something in its appearance was so alien from the habits of his life that a certain strangeness, so it would seem, lay to him even in its possession. He opened it slowly and carefully at last, studying the coronet curiously, and leaving it intact, as though it were some strange insect, that might be expected to sting if it were touched. These were the contents of the letter :

"My Dear Robert :—I hear you are in Germany, and on your way to Schlossberg, and though we know so little of each other—a brother and sister could hardly, I think know less—so much the more I look forward to this opportunity for our becoming better acquainted. Otto tells me that you think of spending the entire winter in Schlossberg. I have still my *pied-à-terre* here, that I have kept on since my husband's death—you know, I dare say, that his love of scientific research led him to reside here generally during the winter months—and though I am not actually occupying it at this moment, but am at an hotel with Aunt Irma whilst some necessary painting and papering is going on, I expect to move back again in the course of a week or two. It is inhospitable of me, I feel, not to invite you at once to take up your residence with me, but my house, when you see it, must make its own apology for its churlishness. For though it is not small, so far as the size of the rooms is concerned, the rooms are few in number, and the accommodation limited in proportion. Aunt Irma is with me, as usual, during the summer, and when she returns to Vienna I hope to prevail on Gordon to let my uncle come to me. So far, he will not hear of it, though it would certainly be the best arrangement ; he has the idea in his head that he and his father ought to be together. It is a great mistake, if he could only be brought to see it. All this, however, is by the way ; my point is to make you understand my regret that I should not have a spare room to offer you. But we shall often see each other, notwithstanding, I hope ; and you must tell me at once if I can be of use to you in looking for rooms, or in any other way. If you will let me know just what you want, I shall certainly be able to discover it. Otto tells me that you go first by your doctor's orders to Schwalbach, so I suppose we must not look for you just yet ; but I write now to bid you welcome to Germany, and to assure you of a still warmer welcome on your arrival in Schlossberg. You will see, by-the-bye, my little Ida, whom

you have never seen ; and Ida's mamma may be excused for believing that that will be a pleasure. As for her mamma, I feel as if you would hardly recognize her ; it must be ten, eleven—yes, eleven years since we met. A lifetime ! Alas ! how many things may not come and go in eleven years.

"Always, dear Robert,
"Your affectionate sister,
"EMILIA VON WALDORF."

Mr. Holland laid aside this letter when he had read it, then took it up and glanced through it once more. Decidedly something about it—it could hardly have been his sister's friendly words—the fine paper, possibly, the vague perfume, the coronet and monogram, excited his displeasure. He tore the paper across and across, replaced the fragments in the envelope, and drew his travelling writing-case toward him. He had the excellent habit of answering his letters by return of post ; and this last letter he had read, first secured his attention now.

"MY DEAR EMILIA (he wrote) :—I have to thank you for your letter of welcome, which I have but now received. It is, as you say, many years since we met, and our paths and duties in life diverge so widely that it is improbable, I fear, that we shall in any case see much more of each other in the future than in the past. I will not, however, fail duly to apprise you of my arrival in Schlossberg, though I need not trouble you by accepting your kind offer to find me an apartment. My good friend, Mr. Sparrow, the English chaplain—you are perhaps acquainted with him—has already suggested an arrangement that, should it be carried out, might, I believe, suit me in every particular. I am none the less grateful to you, however, for your kind proposition. It may probably be some weeks before I arrive in Schlossberg.

"Always, my dear Emilia,
"Your affectionate brother,
"ROBERT HOLLAND."

Mr. Holland's expression as he wrote this somewhat frigid epistle corresponded on the whole with its contents ; but his face relaxed, a smile and kindly look came into his eyes again as he took up the next letter that lay before him, that of his young parishioner. He smoothed it out

on the table beside him to read it through once more before dipping his pen in the ink to answer it.

"My Dear Dulcie (he wrote then):—Your letter has brought me a great deal of pleasure on a somewhat lonely evening—for I often feel very lonely now that I am away from my home and my friends and my flock. And it has given me this pleasure because it proves to me that though I am no longer near you, as I could wish to be, if God's will had not otherwise ordained it, you have not forgotten my words; and what is more, that you are trying to act upon them. I expect great help from you in the parish some day. Willing workers are always needed; you have the will, I know, and you may rely upon my sympathy and encouragement always in all your difficulties. Write to me when you will, dear child. I have had a journey of some length to-day, and am too much fatigued to send you more than these few lines; but I wished to tell you that your letter has been a very welcome one, and that I look to hear from you again.

"And so God bless you, my dear Dulcie,

"Your affectionate friend and pastor,

"Robert Holland."

He had left his business letters to the last; and yet, after all, they also must be answered. With a sigh of weariness the vicar took up his curate's letter. It touched on a point of no great moment, perhaps; but in its very insignificance lay the kernel of the matter—in the attempt to disregard his wishes so soon as his parish lay well behind him. A feeling akin to anger, mingled with a spasm of home-sickness, passed through the mind of the lonely man. With all the tenacity of purpose that made him rarely loosen his hold of a point he wished and intended to carry, he could yet show himself not unconciliatory in the face of opposition, and accomplish his end without giving too much offence. And now he felt persuaded that his dull-headed curate, an honest, hard-working young fellow, the best he had been able to find, would set everything at sixes and sevens, and have the whole parish overrun by Dissenters by the time he returned. Well, there was no help for it; his work had broken him down. He looked at the letters again. Should the choir enter from the vestry or by the west door? If he were but at home, the vicar thought, he would settle the matter in two minutes, against

all the opposition in creation. But away from his parish, what could he do? A very bitter feeling of disappointment, of helpless indignation, filled his heart. He had calculated on many things in leaving his home—on loneliness, on depression, on the languor of ill-health; but a prompt disregard of his wishes in the ordering of his parish had escaped his immediate prevision. Mr. Holland actually rose from his chair and moved toward his portmanteau; a few hours only would take him back to his parish. But in a moment he dropped into his seat again, leaning back with an air of exhaustion, spreading out his white, large-veined hands on the arms of the chair. No, he was too tired; he could not go back; and Richards and the rest of them must do what they would. After all, it was God's will; He knew best; His will be accomplished. He took up his pen again, wrote a brief, sufficiently conciliatory letter to his churchwarden, and one briefer still to his curate.

"DEAR RICHARDS: Let the point be; it is, as you say, not of vital importance. At any rate, at this distance I can do nothing. Barton must have his way; but, as you will discover before long, his way is to be always in opposition.

"Certainly old Simkins is not to have that extra shilling; he has been agitating it for years, but I will not have it. And don't be taken in by the Christian mission women when they call: I never give them a penny.

"I am too tired to write more to-night. Let me hear from you at Schwalbach; but don't worry me more than you can help. You must do the best you can. Yours,

"R. H."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. HOLLAND SECURES HIMSELF AGAINST LOSS.

His correspondence ended, Mr. Holland leaned back in his chair with an air of fatigue and relief, and taking out a small pocketbook and pencil, began jotting down the day's accounts. This is not in general considered an engaging occupation, but Mr. Holland, for one reason or another, almost invariably found in it something soothing to his temper. He was not perhaps, properly speaking, much of a business man, though a certain methodical precision and

orderly attention to details encouraged him to look upon himself as a man of capacity ; but the just balance of his expenditure with the money in his purse afforded him, in its kind, the same degree of pleasure that the just proportions of a work of art may afford to the contemplation of an artist. Only Mr. Holland preferred, perhaps, that the proportions should not be perfectly just. He had the habit in travelling of calculating narrowly beforehand his probable expenditure for the day, and often found a good deal of satisfaction in the fact that he had, after all, managed to save something on that narrow calculation. In the last resort one could generally, he found, economize something in fees to porters, a class of people given to grumble whatever is offered them, and whom, as individuals, one is hardly likely to meet again. This evening, however, his pocketbook promised to afford him no satisfaction whatever, for he had no sooner taken it out than it brought vividly to his mind the *lacune* in his finances caused by that loan of a hundred-mark note to the heedless Elisabeth. It was not that he had forgotten it ; on the contrary, it had lain, a disagreeable consciousness, in his mind ever since ; but it was only now that he began to appreciate in its complete blankness the fact that in a moment of impulse he had thrown away five pounds. It is true that he was in no immediate want of the money, nor, indeed, likely to suffer acutely, even though, as would probably be the case, he said to himself with some bitterness, he should never see it again. He was not wealthy, but neither was he in poverty ; and unpleasant as such a loss would be—nobody likes to lose five pounds—it could not in the end affect him very materially. It was the sense of extravagance, of having spent his money and got nothing in return, that vexed his careful mind. He had, indeed, rescued an inexperienced girl from a situation of no small embarrassment ; and naturally he did not repent of that. But the Vicar of Thornton Briars, who read out the parable of the Good Samaritan with devout intention and belief twice or thrice in the year, felt it a lively hardship that out of all the world on him should have fallen the expense of rescuing a careless girl from the results of her carelessness.

The thing was done, however. He was noting it down with some disgust on the wrong side of his account, when a knock at the door interrupted him, and a waiter entered with a card. Mr. Holland glanced at the name inscribed :

Otto Temple Holland; and in the same moment his half-brother entered the room.

No two men in the world could resemble each other less than Robert Holland and his half-brother. Otto Holland was a splendid-looking young fellow of five or six and twenty, tall, robust, and with an air of health and prosperity that seemed to surround him like an atmosphere. His figure, though well proportioned, might later on incline to stoutness; but at present he had still a youthful alertness and activity of movement. He was dressed and wore his clothes like a well-dressed Englishman; but something in the cut of his mustache and of his strong curling brown hair gave him a foreign aspect. The contrast, I say, between himself and his half-brother with his black grizzled hair, pallid complexion, and feeble physique, was so marked that no one would have suspected the tie of relationship between them. Robert, in fact, took after the old grandfather in Shoe Lane, while Otto strongly resembled his father, Captain Holland. He was extremely handsome, and, without being a coxcomb, had an air of perfect good-humor and content with himself and the world that gave him the appearance of knowing it. It was the air, in short, of a man who takes naturally to his neighbors' flattery, and to whom few things could be so incomprehensible as a quarrel of any kind with life.

This prosperous personage laid down his hat and cane, and greeted his brother with much cordiality. "Good heavens! Robert, how ill you look!" was his first remark, in a tone of easy comment; "or is it only this abominable light? What on earth possesses you to come to a hole of an inn like this? And when you have a second candle, why in Heaven's name don't you light it? So, that's better."

Mr. Holland took the second candle from his brother's hand and blew it out. "Excuse me, Otto," he said, "but it is useless to burn more than one candle. There is enough light to talk by, and it is only an extra charge in the bill."

Otto Holland stared, then broke into a vigorous laugh. "Good Lord, an extra charge in the bill!" he said; "an extra charge—how much, fifty centimes, seventy, a franc? It's worth sitting in the dark for. Well, Robert, you're not changed in the least, I see; it's refreshing to find you still at the same point. You *are* looking ill, though. What's wrong with you?"

"Overwork, prostration," said the clergyman, leaning back in his chair. "I've broken down—that's all."

"Ah, well," said the other, good naturedly, "a winter abroad—a complete holiday, you know—that will set you up again. Suppose you come over to my place now. My wife will be delighted to see you, and we shan't be in your way, you know. In point of fact, I'm never there if I can help it. It was my father-in-law, you know, who bought the place for us; he lives close by; but I hate a country life. We shall be in Vienna again in a month or so; and I'm thinking of buying a house in Venice."

"In Venice?" said his brother. "Why in Venice?"

"Well, Venice or Rome or Naples—somewhere in Italy, in short. I'm not particular; and Venice is handy to Vienna. One might have one in Naples, too, if that were all. I like Italy, and I hate hotels. One ought to have a house of one's own wherever one goes; it's the only way to be comfortable."

"Ah!" said Mr. Holland. He sat silent for a minute. "You have not changed, at any rate, Otto," he said. "You have never, I suppose, reflected on the responsibilities of a great fortune?"

The young man gave another laugh.

"If I haven't, it's not for want of your telling me," he said, good-humoredly. "Now, my idea of the responsibilities of a fortune is to spend your money if you have it; and that's not a thing that can be done in a place like this. Besides, I hate a country life. A week or two of shooting in England is another matter; but here——" He made a grimace, and rising, took the second candle, which was spreading its cheap odor of snuffed candle-wick through the room, and put it carefully outside the door. "Oblige *me*, Robert," he said, coming back and taking out a cigar-case, "by not blowing out a candle again while I am in the room. You compel me to light a cigar, and no doubt you object to cigars. No? Well, as I was saying, why don't you come out to my place? You would have the house pretty well to yourself, and could burn as many candles as you like, without having to think of the bill. You'd better come."

Mr. Holland smiled feebly.

"Thank you, Otto," he said; "but my plans are already made. The doctor, as I wrote to you, has ordered me to Schwalbach first, and then, as you know, I go to Schlossberg for the winter. I shall be there in six weeks or so."

"And a precious dull hole you'll be in," said his brother, striking a match and applying it to his cigar. "Mathilde and I have just been staying there—we were there, in point of fact, when I got your letter. You know, of course, that Emilia keeps on her house still, though what possesses her to stay in Schlossberg, when she has the world to choose from, I don't know. In short, she's there. You've heard from her?"

"Yes, I have heard from her," said Mr. Holland.

"Well," said his brother, "if you want anything done, Emilia will do it for you, you know. She charged me to tell you so. You'll want rooms taken for you somewhere, I dare say, in some hotel or pension. You won't want much of a place, perhaps? Some cheap pension, eh?"

"Where do you stay in Schlossberg?" said Mr. Holland, dryly.

"I? Oh, I always stay at the Kaiserhof. But I don't recommend it to you, my dear fellow; it's one of the dearest hotels in Europe. Not bad, either, as such places go; they're all beastly, of course. But your cheap hotels are simply poison. To be sure, it depends upon what you are accustomed to."

"Ah—well, I won't trouble either you or Emilia," said Mr. Holland. "I care for poison as little as you do, and have no intention of trying it at present. My friend the English chaplain at Schlossberg has promised to find me a suitable accommodation."

"As you will," said the other, indifferently. He gave an immense yawn, and, throwing back his head, sat puffing at his cigar for a minute in silence. Conversation with his brother presented some difficulties, apparently. "Well, I'm really glad to have seen you again, Robert," he said, at last, "though I should have liked to find you in better ease. Apart from rooms, don't forget to apply to Emilia if you are in want of anything." He looked at his watch. "By-the-bye," he said, "you know that Gordon is living now in Schlossberg?"

"I gathered it," said Mr. Holland, with some stiffness, "from Emilia's letter. She mentions his name. But I have heard nothing of him for a long time."

"Ah! I remember; you don't like Gordon. Now, I wonder why the deuce you don't like Gordon? He's the best fellow I know, worth two of you or me. Do you owe him money, by chance? Excuse me," at a movement of his brother's, "but the only reason I can imagine for

really hating a man would be to owe him money." He leaned forward to shake the ash from his cigar. "If you did owe him money—" he said, presently. "Oh, I don't mean you in particular, my dear fellow. Bless my soul! I'm not accusing you. I mean, if anyone owed him money, now would be the time to pay him back, for I fancy he's pretty hard up. You know, of course, they've lost all their fortune?"

"I have heard of it," said Mr. Holland, distantly. "I am ignorant of the details."

"Well, they have; every penny, as one says. There's a sort of hope that Gordon's fortune—what came from his mother, you know—may be got back later; different investments, and so on; but my uncle's is gone, gone. He doesn't care, he says; and upon my word, I believe he doesn't. But Gordon does; he takes it awfully to heart, poor fellow. He got a lectureship, professorship, I don't know what, at Schlossberg, and preaches on Oriental languages for bread and cheese. He vows he likes it—that part of it, I mean; but I'm glad I don't stand in his shoes. To be sure, I shouldn't know what to say."

"I don't see—" began Mr. Holland. He cleared his throat, and began again. "I fail to see," he said, "the especial hardship of Gordon's having to work for his living more than other people."

"Oh, well," said Otto, easily, "it all depends on what you're used to. If you're brought up in the lap of luxury, as the romances call it, it makes a difference, I suppose—so the romances say, at least. Not that I've tried it, nor mean to try it of my own free will. I'm a philosopher, though you mightn't believe it; and so long as I live in this dull world I mean to have the best it gives." He looked at his watch again, and took up his hat. "Talking about money," he said, "are you in want of any, by chance? Just say the word, you know; it makes no difference to me."

The Vicar of Thornton Briars hesitated. He was in no actual want of money, as has been said, and he was affronted by his half-brother's easy arrogance. But that hundred-mark note—it pricked like a thorn in his mind; the present loss, and the doubt whether he would ever see it again. His brother might as well make up the deficit; why not?

"If you could lend me——" he said, doubtfully. "I shouldn't ask it but that I am unexpectedly out of pocket

through the carelessness of another person; but if you could lend me a hundred-mark note without inconvenience——"

Young Holland burst into a laugh.

"A hundred-mark note! Half a dozen, if you like, my dear fellow. Here, I've just been to my banker, by good luck—how many will you have? Anything up to a hundred pounds is always at your service. I'm in earnest, you know; upon my word I am. I know what parsons are—I know what *you* are, old fellow. A stray fifty or two would never come amiss, eh?"

"I am much obliged, Otto," said the clergyman, stiffly; "but I named a hundred-mark note. It will amply suffice for my present needs, and it shall be returned as soon as possible."

"You'll return it when you want to quarrel with me," said the other, good-naturedly. He put up his pocket-book again. "Well, good-by, Robert, and good luck go with you. Don't kill yourself drinking those beastly waters the doctors are so fond of ordering; and if you ever care to come over to my place, you've only to let me know, you know."

He nodded, and left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

A RAPTUROUS FREEDOM.

No brighter sun, I dare say, ever rose on Schlossberg than that which greeted Elisabeth's opening eyes the morning after her arrival. She sprang from her bed and ran with bare feet across the polished floor to throw her window wide open. What a world—ah, what a world! The sun, but just lifted above the high dormer roofs, shone warm and clear upon the broad Place; the fountain flowed and sparkled, the trees cast long shadows across the wide pavement; there was an early clatter of wooden shoes, a clank of pails and pitchers set down upon the stone rim of the basin where the water splashed and circled; and everywhere, above house-roof and gable, the fresh greenness of the forest land. A magic world! In trembling haste Elisabeth dressed herself, and stealing half guiltily from

her room (the house was still so closed and hushed; the deep and silent breath of night still held it, one would say), she stepped noiselessly down the shuttered staircase, out into the open air. She crossed the Place, she passed down the wide street, half in sunshine, half in shadow now, along which she had wandered the night before, enchanted and forlorn; and taking the first path that presented itself from the town, mounted upward through the forest. It was hardly yet six o'clock, and except for the joyous chirp and twitter of the birds as they hopped from branch to branch in the level sunlight overhead, the woods lay deep around her, hardly yet awakened from their sleep. The weeds and long grasses still hung heavily, drenched with dew; her shoes were soaked, the hem of her frock wet through in a moment as she ran along; the air tasted fresh as in early dawn. Elisabeth wandered on and on, now climbing upward by some wide cart-rutted track scored by the weight of a hundred tree-trunks dragged from the heights; now brushing her way through narrower paths, where twigs and leaves swung sharp across her face; or plunging deep into some shadowed hollow, where her feet sank in treacherous moss, and a low murmur declared the presence of a trickling, half-choked stream. The trees crowded round her, before, behind, on every side, or fell apart to show some hollowed dell set close and green among the thick-set boughs, or glimpses down some mysterious glade, opening and lost again, that seemed to hold the deepest secrets of the woods. Ah! hidden secrets of the woods! Elisabeth, peering here and there, now following the beaten track, now straying down those leafy glades, wandered enchanted on. What was it that she saw? Neither elf nor goblin crossed her path, one may be sure; no shaggy monster, with a golden glitter piercing some crack in his horrid hide, approached her with gentle action and strange eyes; no slender maiden clad in sorry weeds, with garments woven of the sun and moon and stars held in the hollow of her hand; no cottage even, with its spreading roof-tree laden with gold and silver fruit. And yet, one and all, they wove a web that was around her as she went; her gods had passed, and the scent of their raiment, the echo of their footsteps, was in the air—no pure harmonious Grecian vision, but the sweet homeliness, the grotesque jollity, the alluring terrors of the Middle Ages; a web woven of sunshine and darkness, of shadowing leaves and shifting gold, and gnarled and twisted boles

and branches. A magic land — the enchanted land of youth.

Elisabeth, wandering onward at her will, had almost from the beginning lost all track of where she was. At first that was only a charm the more ; but presently, as the sun grew hotter and she herself grew tired, she began to feel a trifle scared. The forest-land was broken and very irregular, rising always, but dipping again to hollows lying between the hills. Elisabeth climbed one and another height in hope of gaining some clearer view of where she was, but finding herself baffled continually, either by the thick growth of the trees, or by the lie of the ground, that showed her only stretch after stretch of densely wooded, undulating country, sinking and swelling against the sky, a hundred imaginations began to run riot through her brain. What if she were lost indeed—entangled among forest ways, compelled to wander on and on, to die at last of hunger in the strange recesses of the woods? Her feet began to fail, her head was growing dizzy, when a clearer gleam showed before her through the trees ; and the next moment, emerging from the forest tracks, she found herself confronted by the huge mass of a ruined castle, scarred and shattered, rent as by thunderbolts, flanked by a spacious terrace that hung above a green river, whose endless curves wound through a wide historic plain toward a blue distance of far historic hills. Elisabeth knew where she was now. Turning and returning on her own steps, she had made, after all, no great progress in all these hours, and below her lay Schlossberg, steep-roofed and towered, with its clanging clocks and bells, nestling at the feet of the vanquished fortress on its giant rock above.

Elisabeth knew where she was ; and of all the pleasures she had promised herself in coming abroad, not the least, assuredly, was the pleasure she would find in contemplating the ruins of Schlossberg. But it must be owned that at that moment no sight was so welcome to her as that of a modest little restaurant clinging to a shattered corner of the building, with chairs and round-topped tables set outside, an alluring scent of coffee in the air, and a waiter lounging in the doorway. Elisabeth, who with her healthy young appetite of seventeen had not yet broken her fast that day, felt irresistibly drawn toward the spot. She approached with hesitation, indeed ; there was, probably, she felt, something wicked in the mere idea of breakfasting

alone and in the open air. Still, when one was so hungry —she glanced about her; not a soul was in sight. Elisabeth hesitated no longer; with a courage not far removed from recklessness she approached the waiter and demanded a cup of coffee and a roll.

The waiter (it seemed strange to Elisabeth) found nothing extraordinary in the request, and disappeared to execute her order. Elisabeth seated herself, pushed back her hat from her heated forehead and disordered hair, and resting her elbows on one of the little round tables, sat leaning forward to enjoy the sunshine, the view, the wide morning air, the exquisite sense, too, of freedom and escape from all the accustomed conventions of her life, implied in this proposed *al fresco* breakfast by herself outside the Castle restaurant of Schlossberg. The thought passed through her mind that in the whole world not one person knew where she was at that moment. It might be hard to explain why Elisabeth found this thought so exhilarating; but she did to an extraordinary degree. Her spirits rose from one minute to another; she felt happy to the point of ecstasy; she had never thought so much happiness as this could come to her in all her life.

A footstep near at hand startled her; someone was approaching. It was no very formidable apparition: a young man in a light morning suit and wide-awake, with a book sticking out of his pocket, who, just glancing at Elisabeth as he passed, seated himself at a table behind her, drew out his book and began to read. But the mere sight of a stranger was enough to startle Elisabeth out of her dream of felicity. All her courage seemed to crumple up and vanish; all the terrors and conventions of her life rose and stood before her in stiff array. Forgetful of coffee and roll and hunger, she sprang to her feet and fled. She fled; down the broad zizgag road leading to the town, through the streets, crowded with market people now, where more than once she missed and had to ask her way, never pausing till she was safe within the shelter of the hotel, within the four walls of her own room.

Here the soothing influence of the quiescent chairs and tables that does so much to help us on our tumultuous progress through life calmed her by degrees. She took off her hat, smoothed her untidy hair, and presently stood revolving in her mind what she would do next. The day lay before her, to dispose of as she pleased, it would appear; Elisabeth had no fear but that she would be able to

dispose of it delightfully! But a task also lay before her —of that she was well aware; one, too, that had made a gloomy background to all the sunshine of the morning; she must write to her aunt, and tell her all that had occurred. Ah! no, she was not really free; nay, in this changed aspect of affairs, Miss Elder dead, her pension broken up, what more likely than that a recall to England might come, and all this treasure of months she had counted over so often melt away and disappear? Elisabeth felt quite pale and sick at the very thought. Still, the letter was not yet written; nor, when written, could an answer come for two or three days at least. Elisabeth took new courage from that reflection; she would presently, she said to herself, write her letter; but first of all she must have something to eat.

She ran down the wide shining staircase, and was guided by an obliging waiter to the dining-room, where, in accordance with his suggestions, she ordered an omelette, a cutlet and some coffee; and with a more certain prospect of breakfast than before, sat down at a small table to await it. The room engaged her attention first; long and lofty, it had more mirrors and gilding than she had ever seen in her life before. It was like a palace, Elisabeth thought. One side was mirrored and panelled; on the other, frequent windows stood open to the ground, and led on to a wide gravel terrace, bordered by brilliant flower-beds, and overlooking an open space of gardens. Two ladies, one youthful and dressed in white, the other much older, were pacing to and fro, engaged in conversation. Before them, along the sunny path, scampered a child of five years old, in a loose white cambric frock confined round the waist by a big blue sash. Twice the two ladies passed the window near which Elisabeth was seated; the third time, still talking, they paused in the wide embrasure, as though to enter. The room, to their vision, was empty, Elisabeth sitting a little withdrawn, behind the ample curtain. She had drawn back, indeed, at their approach with one of her sudden shy movements; but not before her observation, so alert in this new world surrounding her, had made her acquainted with the appearance of two people of whom she was destined to see much, and with whose names, at least, the reader has already some slight familiarity.

The younger of the two was rather above the middle height, and wore a fresh white morning dress, whose fashion, though it was sufficiently fashionable, was less noticeable than the grace it took from a form, slender, yet

nobly and generously porportioned. Neither dark nor dazzlingly fair, and with features of no classic regularity, her face had the open sweetness and charm of a summer rose. Her earliest youth was behind her ; she might have been eight or nine and twenty, but the years, so far, had brought only a fuller bloom, and left no unwelcome sign of their progress. If Nature, as one says, shows herself not unfrequently but a grudging and malicious step-mother toward her children, giving this one a hump, that one a crooked nature, a third a sickly frame, her kindliest mood must have animated her when she bestowed her gifts on Emilia von Waldorf. Her blooming cheek, her waving chestnut hair, the clear beam in her eye, all told of perfect health, of a temperament where nothing morbid or sickly could find a place. It was remarked of her that for a twelvemonth after her husband's death she hardly smiled ; and in a nature in which sweet and reasonable laughter rose as naturally as the fresh bubbles of a spring, no funeral elegy could better have indicated the measure of her grief. But that was nearly five years ago, and a character so well-balanced as Madame von Waldorf's had necessarily recovered its equilibrium in a world where her interests were still sufficiently varied. The happiest conditions aided her in life, her gracious form, her serene temper, her clear and cultivated intelligence—an intelligence not too original and acute, but one that placed her easily *en rapport* with every intelligence that crossed her path. That she should have had various worshippers was inevitable. That those worshippers, finding themselves met with a frank and equable kindliness only, should at times have termed her heartless, was inevitable also ; and there was, perhaps, some truth in the charge. Heartless, in the sense of wanting a heart, Madame von Waldorf was not ; but her heart, in so far as it concerned herself, was kept, if one may so term it, for herself ; such tears as she had shed had been tragic, but the world had had no part in them. With the frequent miseries or the rarer joys of a sensitive imagination she had nothing to do ; they were unknown, almost incomprehensible to her ; it was a side of human nature with its defects and its qualities that remained for her a blank. It is true, the incessant cobwebs that such an imagination weaves for itself across life's path would often vanish, swept away by a breath, at her approach ; but such cobwebs are dear to the soul that weaves them ; to have them ignored is apt to leave a point

of unreasonable soreness. The world might grow brighter by her presence, but gloom has its votaries also, especially in these days, when the harmonious is out of fashion. Someone had once told Madame von Waldorf that she belonged to a past generation. She had laughed, and inquired, Did she look so old? She felt young, and sufficiently modern! But there was some truth in the remark. She had the serenity, the freedom from intellectual responsibility, together with the intelligence of leisure, that belonged to women in an earlier and happier period of the world's history.

Such was Emilia von Waldorf.

Her companion was very different; a woman between fifty and sixty, with a broad, benevolent, humorous face. She wore no cap, and her brown hair, untouched by gray, was arranged in wide bands that covered her ears after a fashion of some thirty or forty years ago. She was attired in a drab, printed mousseline-de-laine gown, and carried a drab-colored parasol. She was the Baroness von Leuwine, a woman whose past had afforded her a very varied experience, and who had gained a character for originality through the independence with which she confronted life —from her fashion of dressing her hair, to her habit of spending her leisure hours in a brown holland over-dress modelling in clay. And as she was destined to play a part of some significance in my heroine's fortunes, I may as well, whilst she is standing in the sunshine on the terrace of the Kaiserhof, devote a fresh chapter to some account of that past, and of its results on herself.

CHAPTER X.

BARONESS VON LEUWINE.

Baroness Von Leuwine had led a life entirely unlike any she could have planned for herself, yet one that so admirably suited her peculiar temperament that, with the best planning in the world, she could hardly have schemed more successfully.

It must always be a nice question how far our natural perversity frustrates the schemes of Providence on our behalf; and considering the enormous amount of machinery implied in the normal movement of life, too inquisitive

a scrutiny into the schemes of Providence may as well be at once abandoned as impertinent on the part of us short-sighted mortals, as the preachers say. In the Baroness's case, however, there had apparently been no final frustration through perversity or otherwise ; for at fifty-six her life was both happy and admirable—talents wisely cultivated, wealth wisely spent, and original and benevolent spirit both giving and receiving happiness. It is true that the fairies in attending her cradle had presented her with two or three of the best gifts with which humanity can be endowed : sound health, a love of art, and an absolute indifference to the world's opinion. Of other gifts they appeared at first a trifle chary ; the Baroness was of noble birth, but without fortune ; her face, that in later years pleased through its character and benevolent kindliness of expression, was singularly plain in her girlhood ; her parents died when she was a child, and she struggled up into the world under the supervision of an indifferent though not unkindly guardian. At seventeen she fell in love, with the wisdom and experience characteristic of that age, with the young Baron von Leuwine, half German, half Pole, as nobly born but not much richer than herself, a genius to boot, writing sonnets to the moon with a facility little short of miraculous to the inexperienced Irma. No one so far had admired Baron von Leuwine's poetry quite as much as she did ; he, in turn, deigned to approve of the works in clay and plaster with which the young girl had begun to adorn a room she liked to call her studio. In a word, the young couple were married, and eternal felicity began. The genius turned out but a poor kind of fellow after all ; he was weakly, he was limp ; he found poverty for two more insupportable than poverty for one ; the moon ceased to inspire him ; he left off looking at it, and took to smoking opium with closed windows instead. It was a *dégringolade* from the first month of their marriage ; and the Baroness took the whole of the cracked and sinking palace of bliss on her hardy young shoulders. She cleared out an attic and took to modelling her clay again. But, alas! her skill (though that improved with time) halted sadly behind her need of money, to say nothing of her inspiration ; not a groschen could she earn. Then she turned herself to taking portraits. "I used to make portrait-medallions at two florins the piece," she would say, in recounting these experiences of her youth in after years. "I began with the porter's children ; before long

I had the whole quarter on my hands. But for my husband's failing health it was the happiest period of my life. Only the resources of the quarter began to come to an end." Then taking out a florin she would add: "That was my very last florin; I was reflecting how I should spend it to the best advantage, when the turn in my fortunes came."

The turn was effected by no very romantic or miraculous means. It was simply through the arrival in Vienna of a rich old cousin and godmother, the widow of an ambassador lately deceased in St. Petersburg. This excellent old lady nearly fainted with horror when she heard now, for the first time, of the straits to which her noble young kinswoman was reduced. With benevolence animated by the very stiffest of blue blood, she flew to the rescue, and insisted on installing the Baron and his wife in an apartment in her own spacious mansion. Her gray curls trembled with emotion as she thought of the indignity brought upon her house by that terrible dabbling in clay and plaster. She began by forbidding her god-daughter ever to touch that soul-and-finger-soiling clay again; but there the young Baroness made a stand. She accepted a home for her sickly husband; she insisted on the right of working for herself. "Give me the means of studying as I ought," she said; "it is all I ask." In this conflict of two wills, the younger woman's was the stronger; she gained her point, and having gained it, with the compunction of a strong and generous nature, she offered to resign it again. Finally a compromise was agreed upon. Irma was to be allowed to study, but she was not to be allowed to work. "No more porter's children—that I absolutely forbid," said the old ambassadress. "When you are in a position to demand five thousand florins for a bust, we will see; nothing less." In the meantime, the young Baron and his wife were treated by the old woman as her own children, and as such took their place in Vienna society. It was not the happiest, it was the least happy, period of the Baroness's life. A hundred times she regretted her attic and her porter's children; for her husband, always weak, proved himself incapable of supporting prosperity. He fell into dissipation; he neglected his wife more and more. Every illusion of her girlhood fell dead; it was from her husband she had to take lessons in the worst side of human life and human nature. Ten years after their first meeting her godmother died, leaving

the whole of her immense fortune to her adopted daughter. A month later her husband was dead also, his sickly constitution destroyed by vice and dissipation.

The Baroness was then about thirty. She had lived through a vulgar tragedy of marriage, she told herself with something of horror; the rest of her life should, if possible, be arranged better. She was in no want of interests. She had never attained to the highest skill in the art she had chosen; she could never have felt herself justified in demanding five thousand florins for a bust; but fortunately — or, perhaps, indeed, one should say unfortunately — a passion for an art is not at all incompatible with a lack of the highest touch of genius. The Baroness not only had a passion, but a talent sufficiently remarkable to justify the time she continued to spend in her favorite occupation. She had a sentiment about it, too; it had helped her through the worst straits in her life; there would be a sort of ingratitude in abandoning it when she no longer depended on it for daily bread. At any rate—to give the excuses she gave herself; there were moments when she felt she needed some—she kept on her studio, worked in it when she could, and lent it pretty freely at other times to struggling and impecunious artists. But her principal interest and occupation lay elsewhere. She presently founded, that is to say, first in Vienna, and subsequently, as a sort of subsidiary branch of the first, in Schlossberg, an institution for the daughters of poor clergymen—Madame von Leuwine was a Lutheran by birth and conviction. Henceforward she devoted the greater part of her time, her money, her thoughts, to these two establishments, spending her winters in Vienna, her summers in Schlossberg, in which latter place she was, later on, to find in Madame von Waldorf a valuable helper.

It was about a year after her husband's death that the Baroness adopted her nephew, Karl von Waldorf, whose wife Emilia Holland afterwards became. He was the son of a widowed sister much older than herself, whom she had scarcely known, and who had lately died in Berlin, leaving two or three children indifferently provided for. Karl was the youngest, a lad about twelve years old when he came to Vienna, where he was destined to grow up—and presently to die, poor fellow—in a little circle of intimate friends the Baroness had gathered round her. In this circle, consisting of a number of charming people,

none were on terms of closer intimacy with the Baroness than the entire Holland family. The several children, Emilia and Otto Holland, their cousin Gordon Temple, and Karl von Waldorf, were as much together as their varying ages and occupations would permit. Gordon Temple—he was an only child—was, like his cousin Otto, educated in England; but he went to Harrow instead of to Eton, to Cambridge instead of to Oxford; and in any case the five or six years' difference in their age must have widely separated the career of each. Young Count von Waldorf was educated in Germany; but the families continued to meet at intervals in Vienna during holidays and vacations; and even after Emilia Holland had married young Von Waldorf, even after Gordon Temple had left college and taken, as he did, to travelling through the world, they still regarded Vienna as their home and occasional meeting-place. It was one of those happy and intimate arrangements that time breaks up with a will, one sometimes thinks, but whose hundred kindly associations are apt in defying time, keeping their memory fresh and poignant in the heart of the survivors.

This one, through death and separation, had been broken up some years before that August morning when we first make acquaintance with Baroness von Leuwine; but the latest catastrophe was still fresh of date. It was the great failure of the bank in which Captain Holland's brother-in-law, Mr. Temple, had been partner, involving the loss of his entire fortune. The failure was an honorable one, and the old man, at any rate, had nothing to do with it; he was a man greatly addicted to books, at no time a great lover of affairs, and had early ceased to take any very active share in the management of the bank, though he continued to reside in Vienna. Later on, a severe accident, that lamed him permanently, making him more infirm than his years warranted, induced him to withdraw from business altogether. But his money had remained in the bank, and went in the general crash; there was no altering that. The house in Vienna was given up, and Gordon Temple, accepting a lectureship offered him at Schlossberg, brought his father there with him to live. This is a bald account of what, to the younger man, seemed a tragic cutting of his life in two. He was a remarkably clever young fellow, had made a brilliant career at Cambridge, and on leaving college had declined to enter the bank—that had been the first idea of his family—but letting it

take care of itself so far as he was concerned, devoted the years of his youth and opulence to travelling over the world, where he saw a variety of things with a pair of singularly keen eyes, devoting himself finally to the East and the study of Oriental languages. He hated poverty as much as a man who has never had to think twice about the value of a sovereign can hate it; he gave himself no airs of philosophy about that; but it mattered, after all little enough to him individually. He was used to roughing it on his travels, and in any case he was young. It was on his father's account he hated it most; it was pitiful, it was tragic; once he had shed tears of rage at the thought of the infirm old man wanting a single one of the luxuries to which for seventy-eight years he had been accustomed; and though he, Gordon, had been devotedly attached to his mother, he found himself thanking Heaven she had died some three or four years previously, and been spared this sordid misery. His life, I say, had fallen cut in two; but he did what he could. He settled his father in a small apartment in Schlossberg—that his cousin Emilia lived there (she was extremely fond of her uncle) had largely influenced his decision in the matter—and set to work at his lectures.

But we have wandered altogether from the Baroness, who has been too long left standing in the sunshine on the garden terrace of the Kaiserhof. We may return to her with the more pertinence that, at the very moment we abandoned her, she was talking with Madame von Waldorf about one or two of the people who most concern us in this little history.

CHAPTER XI.

ELISABETH MAKES FRIENDS AGAINST HER WILL.

"Don't talk to me, Emilia!" the Baroness was saying; "I never could tolerate your brother Robert. Oh, I really am as charitable as most people, which is not saying much; though for that matter heaven preserve me from being one of your pseudo-charitable people who pretend they can never see a fault in anyone; they put me out of all patience, I confess. Either they are idiots and don't know

black from white, or they devote all their native malice to putting one in the wrong because one happens to be a little more candid than themselves. But to return to your brother Robert ; I knew little enough of him, it is true, but I declare that all that little was bad. He is underbred, my dear child, he is underbred—there you have the matter in a word. I don't say he has no good qualities ; I should be sorry to think it of your father's son, though, for that matter, he has nothing in common with your side of his family ; but in the little I saw of him, I protest I was unable to find them out."

"That is, perhaps, because you saw so little of him," said her companion, smiling. "Robert has several good qualities, I assure you, Aunt Irma. Ida—oh, that naughty Ida! she is picking the flowers again. Let them be, my child, and come into breakfast ; it will be ready immediately."

The child came running along the sunny path, and flinging herself headlong against her mother—she was Madame von Waldorf's only child ; a little son had died in early infancy—buried her face in her skirts, and, clinging to them with both hands, let herself be dragged into the dining-room. The Baroness was already seated at one of the smaller tables, not far from that at which Elisabeth awaited the arrival of her coffee ; but Madame von Waldorf paused for a moment within the open window to disengage her dress from her small daughter's grasp, and take one of the little clinging hands in hers. As she did so she caught sight of Elisabeth, glanced at her, then glanced again with a little smile, as though in apology for having thought herself alone with her companion. Elisabeth raised her eyes from a Tauchnitz volume beside her plate, which she had opened to beguile the interval of waiting, and remained fixed for a moment in admiring contemplation. Never yet in her short experience had she seen anyone of so much charm and sweetness of aspect as Madame von Waldorf. In a moment she blushed and dropped her eyes again, whilst Madame von Waldorf, unconscious of the impression she had made, passed on to the table where the Baroness was seated, and lifting Ida on to a chair, began pulling down her frock and smoothing her disordered locks. The child, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, chestnut-haired, planted firmly on her fat little legs, seemed the charming copy in small of her charming mother.

"Naughty Ida," said Madame von Waldorf, "to pick the flowers! What would Herr Schmidt say?"

"They're for you, mamma," said Ida, quite unrepentant, and cramming them, heads and stems together, into the front of her mother's white dress.

"Yes, my child; but you mustn't pick Herr Schmidt's flowers for me or for anyone. Look at Aunt Irma; she is quite shocked too."

The child turned round to look at her aunt, but apparently discovered no terrors in her countenance, burst into a jolly laugh; and setting her elbows on the table, became absorbed in the contemplation of a mutton cutlet that her mother was cutting up for her, an occupation in which Ida took the most lively interest, and concerning which she had several suggestions to offer.

The Baroness meanwhile resumed the conversation.

"With regard to your brother Robert, Emilia——" she began.

"Ah, my dear aunt, let my poor brother be!" answered Madame von Waldorf with some gaiety; "he is not so bad, believe me. I know very little of him, of course. I have hardly seen him since I was a child, except at my—except when you did, nearly eleven years ago. I judge him chiefly by what Otto says of him—that is, I read Otto's opinion backwards. You know Otto's way of talking. He says———" She glanced at Ida, and smiled a little. "I need not repeat all Otto's words," she said; "but he and Robert have always been on friendly terms, as you know; and I gather from what he says that Robert is an excellent parish priest, and adored by his parishioners."

"Well, that is something, I admit—yes, it is a great deal," said the Baroness. "I approve of good pastors who are adored by their flocks; but, after all, my dear Emilia, flocks have a natural tendency to adore their pastor—a very ordinary mortal can accomplish as much as that. There is my quarrel with your brother, my dear child: he is ordinary—ordinary. Compare him with your cousin Gordon, for instance."

"Oh, that is not fair!" said Emilia, smiling, "since we are long since agreed that Gordon is perfection. It is a perfection that leaves something to be desired at times, I confess; but he is the most excellent fellow—he has the kindest heart in the world."

"Oh, that is nothing!" said the Baroness; "that is, it is everything, of course; but many men, thank heaven!

have kind hearts, though they have nothing else. But your cousin has so much more. To begin with, he has intellect, he has imagination; he has too much imagination. It makes him fastidious."

"Fastidious—you call Gordon fastidious?"

"You do not?" said the Baroness.

"Oh, undoubtedly, on some points; I might even call him a fidget," said Emilia, smiling again. "I am not in love with him, Aunt Irma, as you are. He snubs me too often, and I don't like being snubbed; and then he is much too obstinate; it provokes me that he should be so obstinate. There is that appointment, now; I feel sure it will be something he would do well to accept; and I don't believe that he will, though he has gone all the way to Cologne to see those Englishmen about it. I wonder, by-the-bye, whether he has come back. He spoke of returning last night."

"Yes, he has come back," said the Baroness. "Schmidt told me he had called early, and finding that we were not down, had gone away. He will come in again presently, no doubt."

"I wish he could have stayed away longer," Madame von Waldorf went on; "it is better for him; it does him good to be away; he simply worries himself at home. I wish extremely he would be reasonable. You don't persuade him enough, Aunt Irma; you don't take my part. You must know that it would be better for him to allow my uncle to live with me, and to make an independent life for himself."

"But, my dear child, I never try to persuade anyone," said the Baroness. "I state a proposition: it is to take or to leave, as they say. I presume other people have as many brains to decide with as I have; Gordon has, at any rate. I have put the case before him; it presents no complications. He must know best whether he can make his father happy or not. Naturally, it is not comfortable for him—for Gordon," she went on. "He has been used to everything money can buy all his life, and he can't understand doing without it. He is too fastidious, I tell you; that is what it is. You should cure him of that, my dear Emilia."

Madame von Waldorf shook her head. "Otto, now," she said—"I might call Otto fastidious, but not Gordon."

"Otto—oh, Otto is a goose!" said the Baroness; "a very

nice boy in his way, but a goose. He thinks as much of his scents and his pocket-handkerchiefs as a woman. It doesn't matter for him. He is a rich man, he has married a rich wife, he can trim his pocket-handkerchiefs with point-de-Venise if he pleases. I was not comparing Gordon with him ; Gordon is not fastidious in that silly sense, thank goodness. But, in fact, I was talking of neither Otto nor Gordon, but of your half-brother, who is of quite a different *pâte* from either. He is not fastidious ; certainly not ; he is not even a gentleman. No, he is not a gentleman."

The Baroness pronounced these last words in English, attracting Elisabeth's attention, that had been divided between the speakers and her book. The conversation so far had been carried on in German, except when Madame von Waldorf addressed her little girl. She had spoken to Ida in English, which she spoke perfectly well, though with a slight foreign accent, and the child had replied in the same language. Elisabeth knew German fairly well, as has been said, but her unaccustomed ear found a certain difficulty in following a rapid conversation ; she had caught but a phrase here and there, mingling it vaguely with the more fluent talk she found recorded in the pages of her Tauchnitz volume. Now she looked up, but immediately sank her head again upon her book on finding that the Baroness, who happened to look round at the moment, was regarding her with some curiosity. Elisabeth disliked being looked at ; she wished she could have had the room to herself. If she had not felt it would be rude, she would have liked to hold up her volume as a screen between herself and these strangers. It was a relief that the waiter approached at that moment, bearing her coffee and an omelette on a tray. But the relief was short-lived, or rather, she exchanged one anxiety for another. Beside the omelette on the tray there lay a letter.

It had been forwarded on a chance from the Pension Elder, and Elisabeth, with a profound sinking of the heart, recognized her aunt's handwriting. That writing had never been a very welcome sight to the girl, and her first thought now was one of alarm. Could her aunt by some occult, by some extraordinary means have learned already what had happened, and sent this letter to recall her home ? A chain seemed all at once to reach all the way from England and bind itself tightly round Elisabeth's heart. With the very energy of despair she opened the

envelope and began to read. The letter was short and ran as follows:

"My Dear Elisabeth:—Only a few hours after your departure I found in my writing-case the enclosed letter of introduction to my old acquaintance, the Baroness von Leuwine; in the hurry of your last preparations I had omitted, I find, to give it to you. I am uncertain as to the Baroness's actual address; her home is in Vienna, but she has the habit of spending part of the year with a relative in Schlossberg, whose precise address I have forgotten. (I have that of the Baroness in Vienna.) Miss Elder, however, will be able, I have no doubt, to ascertain it for you; and should the Baroness now be in Schlossberg, this letter will serve you as an introduction to her. She may perhaps be kind enough to invite you to go occasionally and see her; and Miss Elder can decide whether it is compatible with your other and more important duties for you to do so.

"You will have reached the end of your journey by the time you receive this, and will have enjoyed, I trust, all the new scenes through which you have been passing. You will, of course, begin to attend the different classes as soon as possible, as a twelvemonth will quickly pass, and there is no time to lose. I hope to receive from Miss Elder satisfactory accounts of your diligence and general progress. I have requested her to leave the care of your wardrobe entirely in your own hands, as it is proper you should know how to attend to all these small matters; and I have begged her to see, so far as her numerous occupations will permit of her doing so, that you pay a strict attention to neatness—a point, as you know, in which I have too often found you deficient.

"Your uncle is pretty well. We left town, as we intended, yesterday, and are both enjoying the country air and the hospitality of our friends. The gardens are particularly beautiful this year, and your uncle bids me tell you he wishes you were here to help him eat the peaches.

"Ever, my dear Elisabeth,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"Maria Verrinder."

Elisabeth breathed again. Any crisis in her fate must certainly still be two or three days off; everything remained as it was before. Not often, in fact, in her experience

had she found so little to displease her in one of her aunt's missives. The tone of this one affected her not at all ; she was quite used to being treated by Mrs. Verrinder as a child of seven rather than a person of seventeen, as an irresponsible being, hardly yet able to distinguish her right hand from her left ; and any other treatment would have surprised and confused her. Her most prominent feeling now, perhaps, was satisfaction that it was forever out of the power of the unknown Miss Elder to report on her diligence and exhort her to be tidy. Still, however, as she drank her coffee, her eyes rested on the letter lying on the table before her addressed to Baroness von Leuwine. A Baroness ! a stranger to be confronted ! A vain, a guilty longing to destroy the letter and let her aunt suppose that in her change of residence it had not reached her, possessed Elisabeth for a moment. A vain longing, indeed ; never, as she knew, could she lend herself to such a crime as that. On the contrary, with the impulse that generally urged her to do as she was told, she presently, with a sigh, took up her aunt's letter and read it through again ; then fell to considering in what way she could discover Baroness von Leuwine's address. Miss Elder had vanished from the scene. Perhaps the people in the hotel would know ; yes, probably they knew everyone in the town ; at least, if they did not know, her conscience would be clear. She might ask the waiter, to begin with ; he had seemed to her an obliging and friendly person, not at all formidable. Hearing a footstep behind her, Elisabeth turned round ; but it was not the waiter. It was, as she immediately perceived, precisely the same young man in a light morning suit who had scared her from the Castle restaurant hardly an hour ago.

He had scared her from the restaurant ; but as she was much too hungry to jump up and run away again, even had she felt disposed to do so—but an hotel was different —she sat still, simply feeling slightly uncomfortable and disconcerted. He, on his side, glanced at her as he passed, but with no consciousness, apparently (as was indeed the fact) of having seen her before. Walking up to the other table, he shook hands with the two ladies seated there, and dropped into a chair.

"[illegible] you are back, Gordon," said the Baroness, addressing him with a friendly nod. "Schmidt told me so, indeed. He said you had called early, and had gone away again."

"Yes, I'm back," he said. "I got in late last night. No, nothing to eat, thank you; I had some breakfast up at the Castle restaurant. I have a fancy for the place, as you know, and my father always has his coffee in his own room. You have been to see him, he tells me," turning to Emilia.

"No," said Madame von Waldorf, smiling; "we forgot all about his existence."

"Pshaw!" he said, smiling too, but rubbing his smile out, so to speak, with a movement of his hand across his mouth. He leaned back, and laid his hat and stick on a chair behind him. "He was all right, at any rate," he said, "though I have always the idea when I go away that something may happen before I get back. It's not that he minds being alone, of course; he's used to that; he doesn't want one for ever in the room. And then it amuses him when I come back with something fresh to tell him. Still, I don't know that I did right in leaving him; I am never sure he is being properly looked after."

"I don't think it has done him any harm, Gordon," said Madame von Waldorf, gently.

"Well, no; I suppose it hasn't. There's that woman, Emilia, that you put in," he went on directly; "I've a notion she does nothing when I'm not there. My father doesn't say so, of course; you know what he is; but she seems to me to be always half asleep."

"If that is the case, we must find another," said Madame von Waldorf. "But I had better perhaps speak to her first. Servants are a trouble here, always."

"I don't believe speaking is any good," he said; "besides, I hate troubling you. I don't manage her properly, I suppose; that's what it is. The fact is, I want her to manage me; she doesn't understand that; she doesn't recognize her opportunities. I wish she did."

He threw himself back in his chair, and was silent for a minute. Gordon Temple was a man of about thirty, of middle height and rather square-built figure, but active and alert in movement. He had an excellent honest face, fresh complexioned, with luminous, intelligent gray eyes (they were his best feature), an abundant brown mustache, and thick light brown hair lying in a straight line across his forehead. His expression was good and friendly, but a certain quickness in the movement of the eye, together with something of heaviness in the lines of the brow, told of a man who did not invariably find the con-

ditions of life compatible with perfect placidity of temper. His relations with his cousin Emilia were the friendliest in the world, but they held a past which Madame von Waldorf occasionally found it difficult to forget. Some four or five years previously, on his return to Vienna after an absence of two years, he fell extremely in love with his cousin, whose husband was then recently dead ; and if, at the expiration of her mourning, she would have accepted him, he would have married her. Emilia, as it happened, was in love with her husband's memory, and had no intention of ever marrying again ; but the cousins remained constant and intimate friends, so much so that Gordon presently discovered that he had emerged from the troubled mists of love into the clearer atmosphere of friendship. Emilia, who would have preferred, perhaps, that her Petrarch should continue to write sonnets to her footprint and her eyebrow, was a trifle resentful at first at this transformation of an ardent worshipper into a candid friend. He snubbed her occasionally, as she had said ; occasionally, even, he was a trifle rough ; he permitted himself, not without her permission, to be at home with her ; if he was cross, or if he was bored, he showed it. In return, he was her very devoted servant, looked after her affairs when he could, executed troublesome commissions ; and Emilia, who was really one of the most reasonable people in the world, finished by accepting the situation with the charming grace she brought into all the relations of life. She laughed at her cousin a little, she teased him sometimes, she wrote him long letters when they were separated, confiding most of her troubles, great and small, to him, and sympathizing with his in return. He admired her exceedingly ; he approved of her. She was, after all, very much his idea of what a woman ought to be, and he puzzled himself awhile to know why he had ceased to be in love with her ; he understood it only on the day he perceived that she no longer appealed to his imagination. He was so intimately acquainted with her that there seemed to be absolutely nothing left for him to discover ; they were, in a way, on the same terms as an affectionate husband and wife after ten years of marriage. This added greatly to the solidity, and what may be called the domestic comfort, of their friendship ; but to a man of imagination, as the Baroness had declared Gordon Temple to be, it was fatal to any further romance of love. Madame von Waldorf ended by accepting the situation ;

in fact, on the whole, she preferred it. At the same time, recalling the days when her lightest word had had power to change the color of the world to him, there were moments when she felt that their present attitude, though comfortable, was a little prosaic. They had exchanged the sunset and the moon and stars for a good fire and easy-chairs, and no woman who has been once adored can be expected to accept the change with perfect equanimity. There was a finality about it, too, that in itself is an irritation to a woman, who likes to hold the key of the position in her own hands. Still, being, as I have said, thoroughly reasonable, Madame von Waldorf bore herself with a good grace, and if she felt occasional discontent, Gordon at least never found it out.

At present, no subject occupied her thoughts habitually more than her cousin's domestic troubles. She was considering his last remark with a view to a suitable reply—if he had no further discoveries to make concerning her, she on her side felt that it was impossible to know always how Gordon would take a thing—when the Baroness interposed.

"Well," she said, "and what about this appointment? Is it likely to suit you?"

"Oh, the appointment!" he said. "No; it's no good, though I'm gratified the offer should have been made to me. It's from the Smith Philological Society. They want to send a man out to study and report on various dialects in the regions lying somewhere to the north of Persia, and they thought I might suit them."

"But that is excellent," said Madame von Waldorf. "Did you not accept it, Gordon?"

"No; I didn't," he said.

"Why?" she asked. "Is the pay not sufficiently good?"

"Oh, the pay is excellent; it's about the best endowed society there is. But, in short, Emilia, you are perfectly well aware that I don't want to leave my father, so we needn't discuss the question—no, we need say no more about it. And talking about money," he went on immediately, changing the subject, "reminds me that I hear Robert is coming to Schlossberg for the winter. Is that the fact?"

"I believe so," Madame von Waldorf replied; "he wrote as much to Otto. You know, Otto gets a letter from him occasionally. His health had broken down, he said, and

he has been ordered abroad for the winter, so he is coming here."

"Now I wonder what brings him to Schlossberg," said her cousin. "I should have thought he would rather have gone fifty miles in another direction."

"Well," said the Baroness, with some vivacity, "and we should none of us, I presume, have broken our hearts if he had—except Emilia, perhaps. I don't believe you like him better than I do, Gordon."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I have seen nothing of him for years." He threw himself back in his chair and began a yawn, but immediately suppressed it with a good-humored laugh. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but I was not in bed until one o'clock this morning, and I was up again pretty early too. Well, here's Ida, who has never said a word to me. She has forgotten me, I believe. I have been away for a couple of days, and she doesn't know who I am. You don't know, do you, Ida?"

"No," said Ida, boldly, jumping in her chair.

"Ah, I thought you didn't. Well, then, we shall have to guess. I'm Uncle Otto, am I? No? Uncle Robert, then? Yes; I must be Uncle Robert."

"No—yes!" said the child, with her jolly laugh; "you're Uncle Robert."

"I don't believe she knows who her Uncle Robert is," said her mother. "Do you, Ida?"

"Never mind; I'm Uncle Robert. It's a pity, though, for if I had been Cousin Gordon, and Ida had given me a kiss, she might probably have found a gingerbread man in one of my pockets, though I'm sure I don't know in which."

"Oh, let me see, let me see! I'll try them all!" cried Ida, getting down from her chair in the greatest hurry and climbing on to his knee. "You're Cousin Gordon—there's a kiss. Now let me see."

"Dear me, his head has come off," said her cousin. "You must eat him up at once; it makes me unhappy to see him. And now I think of it, I believe that I left his wife behind in the gingerbread shop; that was very unkind of me; I feel sure she would like to be eaten too. Suppose you ask your mamma to let you come with me and fetch her."

"Oh, I'm going, I'm going," said Ida, slipping off his knee and running to the door. "I'm going to get my hat directly."

"Stop, Ida, stop; where are you going?" cried her mother. "Your hat is here, my child, and your gloves too," taking a minute white silk pair from her pocket, and proceeding to fit them on Ida's fat fingers. "You must be the best little girl, remember, if Cousin Gordon is kind enough to trouble himself with you."

"Oh, I like it," he protested; "there's nothing I like better. Ida takes care of me; I feel quite safe when she has hold of my hand. I want to write two lines first, though, to post on my way. I'll ask the waiter to bring me a pen and ink in here."

He turned to speak to the waiter, who had re-entered the room and gone up to Elisabeth; and in the momentary silence that fell upon the party a crisis arrived in the fate of our heroine, for in that moment her voice was distinctly heard inquiring: "Can you tell me the address of the Baroness von Leuwine?"

The man hesitated, and turned with a half-puzzled, half-appealing look toward the other table. The Baroness, who was seated with her back to Elisabeth, looked round at the sound of her name, and contemplated the girl for a moment in silence. "I am wanted, apparently," she said, then, with a smile on her broad, benevolent face, and rising, moved across the intervening space to Elisabeth.

"My dear young lady," she said, "I hear you inquiring the address of Baroness von Leuwine. Here she is, very much at your service. In what can I be of use to you?"

Elisabeth had sprung to her feet. "This letter——" she said, stammering. "My aunt sent it to me to send. She knows the Baroness von Leuwine."

"Comme cela tombe!" said the Baroness. "Here I am. But sit down, my dear child, and tell me who your aunt is. I am delighted in any case to make the acquaintance of her niece."

Elisabeth looked rather bewildered. "My aunt is Mrs. Verrinder," she said. "She wrote to me to find out the Baroness's address, and send her this letter."

"Precisely; and I am Baroness von Leuwine, very much at your service, as I said before." She drew a card-case from her pocket, and taking out a card, laid it before Elisabeth. "I see," she said, smiling again, "I must introduce myself in form. My house, you perceive, is in Vienna; but for the moment I am staying in this hotel. And now, will you permit—will you excuse me if I read my letter?

I foresee it will prove the shortest road to our making acquaintance."

She opened the letter and ran her eye over its contents, slightly raising her eyebrows as she did so ; then, replacing it in the envelope, sat considering Elisabeth for a moment. "I knew your aunt some years ago," she said ; "it is extremely amiable of her to have remembered me ; I must write and tell her so. And so you, my dear young lady, are her niece—or, rather, her husband's niece, she informs me. But how is it, if I may inquire, that you are here ? She mentions the Pension Elder——"

"Oh, I was to have gone there," said Elisabeth. "I have come for the classes ; I was to have been with Miss Elder. But when I got there last night I found that she had died the day before, and that the house was shut up, and so I had to come on here."

"But, bless me, that will not do at all," said the Baroness ; "it is not right, my dear, that a child like you should be alone in this big hotel."

"Oh, I like it—I like it," said Elisabeth, very quickly. "I never enjoyed anything so much before—never."

"Yes, yes," said the Baroness, "we understand all that ; it is a little liberty that we have found, and it is all new. Nevertheless, this hotel is too large and too public for a young girl to be in by herself. It will not do."

"Oh," said Elisabeth, reddening a good deal. "I could not help it. I went first to the Pension Elder."

"Yes, yes ; and they sent you on here. Yes, I understand perfectly. It is not your fault. But it will not do, my dear young lady ; it will not do. Why, how old are you ? Fifteen ? Sixteen ?"

"I am seventeen ; I shall be eighteen in the spring," said Elisabeth. The tears came into her eyes ; she had not minded being alone ; she loved to be alone ; but in the midst of these strangers she felt inexpressibly forlorn.

"Eighteen in the spring," said the Baroness, smiling. She saw the girl was frightened, and, taking one of her hands in hers, patted it kindly. "You don't look so much, my dear," she said. "And your aunt is sending you to school ? Why, it is time for you to be coming out into the world, not to be going in."

"Oh, I like it—I like it," said Elisabeth again quickly. She had a terror that this new acquaintance, this unknown friend of her aunt's, should suggest her immediate return to England. "I am not going to school," she said, "only

to classes; and I like coming abroad better than anything."

"Yes, yes, we know all about that," said the Baroness, still holding the girl's hand in hers. "We have a little more freedom than at home, and we are seeing something of the world. And now, my dear, I'll tell you what you shall do. You have written to tell your aunt about Miss Elder? You are going to do so to-day? Certainly, you must on no account neglect it. And meanwhile, for the present, you join our party and belong to me. Yes, that is quite arranged. Emilia," turning to Madame von Waldorf, "here is a young lady, Miss Elisabeth Verrinder, whom I have adopted for the present; she will be with us. There is a little empty room just opposite yours that she can have. I will speak to Schmidt about it at once."

"Certainly, that will be just the thing," said Madame von Waldorf, with her charming smile. Elisabeth glanced at her again; she felt *gauche*, shy, helpless, miserable beyond words, and yet conscious of a certain pleasure and wonder in being thrown into relations with anyone so beautiful as Madame von Waldorf. She could never have imagined it possible. "You are a stranger here?" Emilia continued with kind intention. "What could we do, Aunt Irma, to amuse Miss Verrinder? We might go to the Castle, and to the college gardens afterward, perhaps, to hear the band play."

"Oh, thank you, I don't think I could," said Elisabeth, starting. Her mind ran rapidly over the details of her simple schoolgirl wardrobe, her gloves, her frock, her hat. What had she to wear worthy of being seen beside Madame von Waldorf? "Oh, I couldn't, thank you," she said again. "I must write to my aunt."

"Well, well," said the Baroness, tapping her kindly on the shoulder, "we won't torment you, my dear. Write to your aunt, by all means—in fact, you must do so. If you like to go now, I will come presently and see to your things being moved. Yes, yes; we shall do very well together, you will see," she said, as Elisabeth moved away.

"She is shy," said Madame von Waldorf, looking after her.

"She is a little schoolgirl—a little goose," said the Baroness. "I know English girls of that kind, brought up like nuns between the schoolroom and the nursery, and knowing no more about life and themselves at eighteen than the bird out of its egg yesterday. Out they come

with a dozen or so of dates and French and German verbs in their foolish little heads, and eighteen years of their life gone. A fine way to train up a well-judging, healthy, sensible woman. Happily it is a fashion that is going out, I understand. As for her aunt," the Baroness continued, "I remember her—a little dried-up, pushing woman, whom I never liked. They were at Homburg, that her husband might drink the waters. Either they or the climate disagreed with him extremely ; but his wife liked the gayety of the place, and nothing would induce her to move. I remember him, too—a soft, good-natured man, who never in his life, I should think, had his own way in anything. Why she should have written to me, I cannot imagine. As things have turned out, however, I am glad she did ; I have taken a fancy to the girl."

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE PENSION WERNER.

Some few weeks later Elisabeth, seated at the little window of a high-set upper chamber, was watching the fading of the red sunset hour. Twilight filled the room, a spacious attic with sloping walls and ceiling, a china stove, a wooden bed and huge red *duvet*, a shabby little green stuff sofa, and a small table with a faded cloth, on which Elisabeth's books and papers lay piled together in confusion. A room of no great pretension, it will be seen ; but that famous glow of romance, dear to Elisabeth's young heart, shone through the square casement where she sat, in the splendor of the evening red lying low beyond the misty plain and darkening hills, crowning her attic, or so she thought, with a finer glory than that of all the mirrored velvet of her little apartment at the Kaiserhof. Here, from her high window, her dusky, steep-ceiled room, dusk within and evening red without, she sees the strange procession of the Middle Ages moving, as it were, across the twilight plain—strange and grotesque region of the imagination, twilight, too, in the dusk of years ; where a fantastic death for ever walks hand-in-hand with rich, fantastic life, where sanctity and devilry dwell side by side ; where witchcraft brews its philtres, and life-blood signs the bonds of hell, whilst high overhead bells swing

to heaven in mid-air, as roof above roof, buttress and pinnacle and turret are piled and soar to darkling towers and spires that rise against the sunset and the stars. Elisabeth, gazing from her window, is feeling it all with a richness of feeling that could find no utterance in words. Only tears fill her eyes. She is not content—ah, no, she is not content. But she is happy. Once more she says to herself that never in her whole life had she thought to be so happy.

In these last few weeks the immediate problem of her destiny had solved itself, as such problems are bound to do in the progress of time, though not always to such large satisfaction as this of Elisabeth's. It was Baroness von Leuwine who had furnished the solution on this occasion, as set out in a letter she addressed to Mrs. Verrinder two days after her first introduction to Elisabeth.

"DEAR MRS. VERRINDER," she wrote in the English that she both wrote and spoke with considerable correctness and fluency, "I have to thank you for the amiable memory that recalls me to your mind after these several years that we have not met. But the summer at Homburg—where, as you so kindly remember, we saw each other with some frequency—is one of the pleasant reminiscences of my life, and I feel indebted to you for reviving one of its pleasures, that of your amiable society, by the letter forwarded to me through your niece. Pray believe that I reciprocate the friendly expressions you use in it toward myself.

"I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of your niece—I should say more accurately, I believe, your husband's niece—two days ago. She will have written you, no doubt, a full account of the awkward circumstances through which she finds herself in this hotel; and as you, dear madam, have kindly made us acquainted with one another, I take the liberty of considering her under my protection for the moment. She pleases me. She is very shy, I observe, which is a pity; I consider it, indeed, an extreme stupidity for a girl of seventeen to be too shy to answer rationally when she is spoken to. But I am bound to admit I consider it in a great measure due to your English system of education; and as regards Elisabeth, though she is extremely shy, I perceive that she is also extremely intelligent. I am accustomed to see a great variety of young girls, and am seldom mistaken in my estimate of

their character; and your niece, unless I am more mistaken than usual, has a fresh strain of imagination and feeling that distinguishes her from the general herd of bread-and-butter misses, as you call young people of that foolish age in England. She has her wits about her, notices everything worth seeing, and is perfectly capable of taking care of herself in an emergency—as was proved, indeed, in the dilemma in which she was placed on her arrival here. Her shyness does not in the least interfere with that! But to whom do I write all this? You, dear madam, after seventeen years' acquaintance with your niece, must certainly be as well aware that she has admirable qualities as I who have known her but forty-eight hours. If I enlarge upon her merits, it is simply to emphasize my first remark—that she pleases me. She pleases me so much that I write to propose she shall remain here under my care during the week or ten days that must elapse before the house of my niece, Madame von Waldorf, in which some painting and papering is going on, is ready to receive us. During that time we retain our rooms in this hotel; but afterwards, though I hope often to see Elisabeth in the month or two before I return to Vienna, I can, I regret to say, do little for her personally. I have, however, a proposition to make. Though Miss Elder's excellent pension is closed, there are others in Schlossberg, and I can especially recommend for quiet and decorum one kept by a German lady, Frau Werner, who was at one time nursery-governess to a friend of mine, but who subsequently marrying, and getting into difficulties after her husband's death, started this pension by the advice of my friend and myself. I give you these details to show you that I know all about Frau Werner. She has a very good house in the Peterstrasse, and it is generally full all through the autumn and winter months. In about ten days the British chaplain (furnished to Schlossberg by I don't know which of your English societies), the Reverend Mr. Sparrow, with his wife and daughter, will be taking up his quarters there until next spring. They are not people I like extremely; they were here last season, when I had occasion to see something of them, though in a different house, and they—I should perhaps say he—struck me, to say the truth, as both *borné* and arrogant. But though I may not like them, they are perfectly respectable and well looked upon; and Mr. Sparrow has all the *prestige* that attaches to your English

clergyman ; his wife and daughter are good-natured, and they would, I believe, be quite willing to have your niece under their care at the Pension Werner. They would, as I understand it, have no trouble and very little responsibility in the matter, as your niece will be attending classes all day, and Madame von Waldorf and myself will do our best to look after her in any little difficulties as to toilette, society, and so on, that might arise. But she can sit by Mrs. Sparrow at table, there will be someone for her to speak to ; she will be under proper protection, in short, and not alone in the world. Pray let me know, dear madam, if you approve my suggestion, as in that case I will at once speak to Frau Werner and see that Elisabeth is properly housed. For the present, as I have said, I am delighted she should be with us. She is a studious young lady, I find, and expresses a wish to begin her classes at once. But they do not, as a fact, open for another fortnight ; and in any case it is as well that she should see something of Schlossberg and its surroundings in this lovely summer weather ; so we are proposing some excursions. You see, dear Mrs. Verrinder, I have taken possession of her as a consequence of your letter. But I am extremely fond of young people, and consider it a point of honor to make them fond of me. I do not even despair of succeeding, before the ten days are over, in inducing Elisabeth to speak of me of her own accord."

And hence my heroine's content ; since Mrs. Verrinder having nothing better to suggest (she did not in the least desire her niece's return, if the girl had but known it), Elisabeth was presently introduced into Frau Werner's establishment, and put in possession of that spacious, shabby, dusky abode of happiness in which we find her. Her aunt, indeed, was not without some fear that the arrangement might prove altogether too agreeable for the moral rectitude of a young person like Elisabeth. She wrote as much to Elisabeth herself ; she also wrote to the Baroness, thanking her for her kindness in undertaking some supervision of her niece, and requesting her to see that Elisabeth did not enjoy herself too much. It need hardly be said that these were not the precise words used by Mrs. Verrinder even to herself ; but there is no doubt that that lady, whose views of life were pedantic rather than sympathetic, was of serious opinion that for a young girl of Elisabeth's tastes and character to enjoy herself,

might gravely affect her moral progress. But all this hardly touched Elisabeth's content. Her aunt was miles —a year off ; the present was all her own to be happy in. She had her classes to attend, and learning was delightful to her. Elisabeth cared greatly for books ; and among the visions of a future in which she occasionally indulged, none pleased her better than that of some high, Faust-like chamber, venerable with the moral dust of ages, and herself a lonely student, seated in the midst before a table piled with weighty tomes, imbibing the ancient wisdom that springs perennial beneath that dust. The vision, I say, pleased her ; for Elisabeth had that possession of doubtful gain to its owner, a solitary soul—the soul that in its natural craving for solitude, its human craving for sympathy, sends its possessor tossing through life from one contradiction to another, from whirlpool to whirlpool, as one may say, where the opposing currents meet. For the moment, it was one of Elisabeth's motives for content that she was floating down the current of solitude. Never in her life before had she had so large a freedom of lonely hours ; and to a youthful solitary soul no deeper motive for content could be imagined. But if the girl had lonely instincts, she was not insensible to human kindness ; on the contrary, no friendly word was uttered but an ardent and grateful heart sprang to meet it ; and in that great kindness she had encountered since she came abroad, in the Baroness, in Madame von Waldorf, in Frau Werner, and the people in the pension, she was beginning to unfold a little ; the frost that until now had held her young life too much in check was beginning to melt. Yes, she was happy as she had never been before—never. "If it could but last forever!" thinks Elisabeth, as she sits at her attic window, watching the fading sunset. At least she has a year before her—the immeasureable treasure of a year.

A bell rang below, the signal for supper, and Elisabeth started up. She had not known it was so late. She had the habit, by Mrs. Sparrow's request, of making her appearance in that lady's room some five minutes before the hour for meals, so as to descend to the dining-room under her immediate eye. She struck a match now, lighted a candle in haste, and began to arrange her hair before the little square mirror set on the top of a chest of drawers. She was struggling still with her thick rebellious locks—they were one of the chief beauties of the young unformed girl, but no hairpins her skill could set ever held them

tidily for an hour together—when a tap came at the door; it opened in obedience to her summons, and a girl stood on the threshold.

She was of about the same age as Elisabeth, a plump, eighteen-year-old damsel, fair-haired and rosy-cheeked, with light grayish-blue eyes, and an uncertain, amiable mouth. Her fingers, which were plump also, were noted for the force with which on Sunday they could strike the harmonium, whilst with a flat, not unpleasant voice she led the psalmody for her father's congregation. Her name was Mary Sparrow, and she was the only daughter of the English chaplain. She stood on the threshold of Elisabeth's room, letting her eyes wander slowly round the dimly-lighted apartment, until they finally rested on Elisabeth's untidy table. Then she spoke in flat monotonous tones.

"The tea-bell has rung, Elisabeth. Mamma is waiting."

"I know, I know," said Elisabeth, hurrying her operations; "I am sorry, I didn't know it was so late. Please ask Mrs. Sparrow not to wait, Mary. I am coming."

"Mamma said," continued her interlocutor, without noticing her words, and advancing a step into the room, "that she sends you these, Elisabeth, and she hopes you will read them. She thinks they may do you good. She told papa she thinks you stand sadly in need of a little sound religious instruction. You don't mind my telling you, Elisabeth?"

"I don't think I have time to read the books, thank you," said Elisabeth. "They are tracts—I don't like tracts, not that kind; and I have my class books."

"Mamma says to papa she thinks it is sad for a young girl to give so much time as you do to mere profane reading, and so little to Bible studies. And she said, Elisabeth, she thought it a great pity that Madame von Waldorf had kept you there last Sunday, instead of allowing you to return to service and the evening hymn-singing."

"I went to church in the morning," said Elisabeth, hastily, and coloring. Churchgoing was always a sore point with her. It was on her conscience that she could not enjoy it more, that her attention strayed, that long prayers, a long Litany, long Psalms and Lessons wearied her; that she could not, in short, feel about going to church as good people feel. She thrust the last pin into her thick locks, and turned round.

"Madame von Waldorf asked me to stay," she said. "She would not if it had been wrong. It is different

abroad; people don't keep Sunday in the same way. I always go to church twice at home; I have to."

"Yes; that is what mamma says," replied Miss Sparrow. "She said to papa it was sad that a young girl like you should fall into corrupt foreign ways as soon as you come abroad, and that it showed a sad want of sound religious training. One of these tracts is about keeping the Sabbath; you don't mind my telling you, Elisabeth?"

"I don't mind your telling me *anything*," said Elisabeth, with a flash of impatience; "but I wish, Mary, if you don't mind, you would take away those tracts. I—I don't mind some kinds of religious books; I told your mother so when she asked me. But I don't like that kind," touching with one finger the little heap of tracts Mary had laid on the table.

"No, mamma said she was afraid you cared very little for pure Gospel truth," said Miss Sparrow, in her flat, melancholy tones. "I think I must leave the books, Elisabeth. Mamma can't make you read them, as she said to papa; but a word in season and out of season is her motto, she says; and there they are, at any rate. Shall we go down now, Elisabeth? Mamma has been waiting for some time, and she says she likes to be early, before Frau Werner fills up the teapot the second time, because after that the tea is always so weak. Mamma wanted Frau Werner to allow her to make the tea instead, but Frau Werner wouldn't; I'm sure I don't know why. I am sure an English person must know how to make tea better than a German. Mamma says Frau Werner would have let her, she thinks, but that Mrs. General Cleaver prevented her. Mrs. General Cleaver always tries to prevent what mamma wants. It was she, mamma thinks, who made Frau Werner refuse to let papa read family prayers every evening in the salon, as mamma proposed. Mamma says she is sure there are several ungodly people in the house who go to bed without saying any prayers at all, and if we could have had family worship in the salon every evening at half-past eight, as mamma proposed, they would have had no excuse not to attend. They could have gone on with their occupations afterwards, mamma says."

This string of confidential remarks was uttered by Miss Sparrow as, with her arm linked in that of Elisabeth, she descended flight after flight of the dimly-lighted wooden staircase that led from the upper regions of Frau Werner's pension to the dining-room and salon on the ground-floor.

She quitted Elisabeth's side, however, at the foot of the last flight of stairs on the apparition in an adjoining doorway of a tall and portly lady dressed in brown silk.

"My dears, my dears," said this personage in an impressive voice, "you are late."

"Elisabeth was not quite ready, mamma; she is sorry; it shall not occur again," said Mary Sparrow, amiably acting as interpreter for Elisabeth, left a step or two behind; "and we are not so very late, mamma. I saw Frau Werner go in just as we were coming down-stairs; she will not have filled——"

"Enough, Mary, enough. Go in, my dear, to your father; he has taken his place already. Come, my dear Elisabeth. Try, my dear child, to cultivate a little more punctuality. The Christian virtues, as I have more than once endeavored to make you understand, depend greatly upon each other, and a failure in one is apt to bring about a failure in all. Unpunctuality involves loss of time, and what is so precious as fleeting time? Inconvenience to others also, and too often, alas! loss of temper. But enough; it will not occur again, I am sure."

Mrs. Sparrow was a person of presence, as the saying is, and found a constant pleasure in the conviction that the impressive dignity with which she carried herself through the walks of life created precisely the sensation she felt to be her due. Her dress exhibited a skilful adjustment of the claims of piety and those of unregenerate worldliness; its materials were flimsy, that is, its fashion a year or two behind date; but it affected bright colors and a certain showiness of effect. Mrs. Sparrow had, in fact, what is called a showy taste in dress, which she might have held it unchristian to entertain, had she not persuaded herself that something must be conceded to unconverted prejudices, and that in her position as wife of a British chaplain she owed it to herself and him to give no place to the scorner, but show that she knew how to meet the worldly on their own ground. It would have cost the good woman so large a pang not to gratify this harmless taste, that she was to be congratulated on her happy solution of a somewhat nice difficulty. She seldom wore anything more frivolous, however, than a garment in a brilliant shade of brown, trimmed with a good deal of gimp and fringe; and this in the evening was further enlivened by an arrangement of Irish crochet and green ribbons, fastened at the throat by a large seed-pearl brooch. A cap of similar ma-

terials, secured by another seed-pearl brooch, adorned her head ; and the chasteness of these decorations *en suite* appeared to Mrs. Sparrow to utter the last word in refined good taste. She had a second *parure* of Honiton lace and blue ribbons, to be worn with a topaz brooch and pin ; but these she rightly esteemed at once too decorative and too precious for an ordinary pension tea ; they lay apart in a drawer, wrapped in silver paper, reserved for more stately occasions. Mrs. Sparrow was not popular in the pension. It was her misfortune, indeed, to arouse in others a degree of animosity altogether out of proportion to her demerits. She had the highest opinion of the dignity of the clerical office, and as her husband's wife, the wife of the British chaplain, she considered it incumbent on her to undertake all the more showy parts, if so irreverent a word may be permitted, of his clerical duties. She assumed the position of lady of the house, received and instructed the newcomers, turned a discriminating eye upon those who went to church and those who stayed away, cleared the salon on Saturday night of profane literature, locking up the glass bookcase that contained the innocent collection of innocuous fiction provided by Frau Werner for the entertainment of her visitors, and strewing the table with religious volumes and tracts of her own selection. Of the piano also she had secured the key ever since that fatal Sunday afternoon when she discovered two young Germans entertaining themselves by playing a selection of frivolous waltzes. No profane hand afterwards disturbed its Sabbath silence ; it was kept rigidly locked until after evening service, when Mrs. Sparrow herself opened it, that her daughter Mary might accompany and lead the British hymn-singing to which the salon on Sunday evening was consecrated. It was not surprising that Mrs. Sparrow was unpopular ; and yet a worse woman might have excited less animosity. She might be narrow, conceited, and dogmatic, but she was sincere ; she did what she believed to be her duty unflinchingly, and she had the saving grace of a warm and motherly heart. Elisabeth might easily have fallen into worse hands than Mrs. Sparrow's. She lectured her indeed, she shook her head over her, she disapproved of her ; but she was good to the young girl, and looked after her with kindness ; she saw that she ate her dinner and changed her wet shoes, that her room was comfortable, and her stove lighted on chilly days. Elisabeth, with that young perversity of which she had as large a share

as any of her contemporaries, did not greatly like the looking after by which she benefited ; but unlike many of her contemporaries, she had a great capacity for reverence, an ardent affection in return for kindness ; and she attached herself with warm gratitude to this woman, whom she could not greatly like, with whom she had perhaps not one idea in common. For it is the large compensation that life offers for the hardness of life, that to one trained in harshness each human kindness comes as a divine surprise, an unlooked-for gift from heaven. And something of this nature, in its degree, had Mrs. Sparrow's kindness taken on itself in Eliasbeth's eyes.

She followed that portly lady now into a long and rather dingy dining-room, where on a long table, covered by a cloth not absolutely fresh, was spread the nondescript meal known indifferently as tea or supper. Frau Werner was an excellent woman ; but the terms on which she received her *pensionnaires* forbade a very lofty ideal in the matter of forks and spoons and table-linen. The food, however, was abundant, and some twenty people seated round the table were contemplating in a moment of suspense the singular meal of cold meat and cranberries, rolls and butter, and slices of sweet currant-bread, provided for their consumption. Frau Werner sat at the bottom of the table behind her teapot ; facing her at the top, by right of priority, sat Mrs. Sparrow's adversary, Mrs. General Cleaver. Mrs. Sparrow herself with Elisabeth occupied the two centre seats on one side of the table facing her husband, who with his daughter sat opposite. This was Mrs. Sparrow's own arrangement ; next to the head of the table, which obviously (she had made the observation more than once) should be her place or Mr. Sparrow's the centre was the best strategic position to occupy. She could control the conversation right and left ; and being one of those fortunate, if alarming individuals who can listen to two or three people speaking at once, there were few subjects introduced toward whose discussion she could not manage to contribute a few words.

"My dear, say grace, if you please," she said now, addressing her husband before seating herself.

The Reverend Mr. Sparrow, who was reading, looked up at this appeal, started to his feet, and with his hands on the table, looked round to secure attention. "For what we are about to receive———" he pronounced then in strong tones, and sitting down again, recommenced read-

ing. He had the habit, that some people resented, of reading throughout supper-time, generally polemical pamphlets which he scored with a thick black pencil. Mr. Sparrow was fond of polemics, considering argument his strong point. He was a high-nosed man, with a thin-cheeked, reddish face, wisps of black hair turning gray on his forehead, and a harsh voice. If Elisabeth had conceived a certain affectionate gratitude for Mrs. Sparrow in these last weeks, she certainly felt none for her husband. On her gratitude, indeed, he had no claim ; he seemed barely to recognize her existence ; and moreover, as she often said to herself, he did not look like a clergyman. Elisabeth, as we know, had a medium of her own through which she contemplated members of the clerical profession ; but finding it impossible through that or any other medium to admire Mr. Sparrow, that was how she compounded matters with her conscience. He did not look like a clergyman ; he looked like a Dissenting minister. It was perhaps well that Mr. Sparrow was not made acquainted with a comparison that would have found little favor in his eyes, for though he might speak of Nonconformists as brethren, not the less did he appreciate the dignity in his own person of belonging to an Established Church. He preached immense sermons on Sundays, to whose dulness Elisabeth's ill-repressed yawns as she sat by Mrs. Sparrow testified. He was fond of discussion, as has been said, though he indulged in it but little at the Pension Werner ; no one there was worthy of his powers. He preferred to take the field and try a fall with some man of science, such as he occasionally met during his ministrations in Switzerland or elsewhere during the summer ; and in these wrestlings, according to Mr. Sparrow's subsequent reports, his scientific adversary was left nowhere at all. But though he set the members of the Pension Werner in no such cruel dilemma as might be implied by this estimate of his own powers, he was not more popular there—he was even less popular—than his wife. A very little urbanity would have made him so ; for the prepossessions of a British community abroad are all in favor of its chaplain. That Mr. Sparrow should have been able to set aside these prepossessions says worlds for the completeness with which he had cultivated a harsh voice and overbearing demeanor.

The supper meanwhile proceeded. Frau Werner dispensed her cups of weak tea, the plates of cold meat dis-

appeared, the piles of currant-bread vanished. To Elisabeth, lately emancipated from the convent-like routine of her school life, its one o'clock dinner and six o'clock tea, this curious and ascetic fare presented no hardship. She simply found the entertainment a dull one. She looked with envy on Mr. Sparrow, energetically perusing and scoring his pamphlet amidst general obloquy, and wished he might bring a book to table with her also. She also wished the table-cloth were fresher, the knives and forks less dingy ; in that respect, alas! the Pension Werner contrasted most unfavorably with the Kaiserhof. She wished that Mrs. Sparrow would not wear that large pearl brooch ; that Frau Werner would wear a brooch of any kind to fasten a gaping collar ; that Mrs. Cleaver would not feed her Skye-terrier Pinch at table ; that Mary Sparrow would not stare with such large round eyes at Herr Nauders, the young divinity student who boarded at Frau Werner's, then blush and turn away when he looked in her direction ; that Mrs. Sparrow and Mary finally, conniving at Mr. Sparrow's habit of leaving his supper untouched whilst he pursued his studies, would not prolong their own meal indefinitely and keep Frau Werner and everyone else waiting. From all which, it will be perceived that Elisabeth, in the midst of various matters for content, was by no means without that measure of displeasure that is supposed to render more exquisite the pleasures of life. The meals at Frau Werner's were, in fact, a daily penance to her. She left her books for them with reluctance ; she escaped from them with joy. But indeed, what heroine, gazing with high romantic thoughts from her roof-chamber, visited by sun, moon, and stars above a wide historic view, could be expected complacently to descend to a dusky ground-floor parlor to eat dull food in the company of duller people? Such complacency was, at any rate, beyond the reach of Elisabeth.

To-night, however, fate, in a conceding mood, had a diversion in store. A letter was brought to her toward the conclusion of the meal, forwarded from the Pension Elder, where, by the advice of the Baroness, she had left her address with the woman in charge of the now empty house. Elisabeth had thought it a needless precaution ; she had hardly a correspondent in the world except her aunt, whose letters, she felt sure, would never go astray. But she was glad now that she had taken it, for this letter was not from Mrs. Verrinder ; it was addressed in a writ-

ing quite unknown to her. She held it in her hand, studying the direction, trying to guess the writer before opening the envelope. Mrs. Sparrow's vigilant eye was upon it in an instant.

"A letter!" she said. "Why, the post is not due for an hour yet. Oh, I see; forwarded from the Pension Elder. Dear me, I seem to know that writing; it is certainly familiar to me, if I could only recall whose it is. James," taking the letter without ceremony from Elisabeth's hand and passing it across the table to her husband, "whose is that writing? I know it, I am sure."

The Reverend Mr. Sparrow looked up from his pamphlet and contemplated the letter presented to him. "Holland's," he said. "It's Holland's handwriting; and why he doesn't write to me I cannot imagine. I sent him the address of this place more than a fortnight ago, and asked him if he would like a room engaged for him, and have had no answer. He will have to go elsewhere now; every room is taken."

Mr. Sparrow became lost in his pamphlet again. Mrs. Sparrow took up the letter and studied the address anew.

"Of course," she said, "it is Mr. Holland's handwriting. I was not aware, my dear Elisabeth, that he was a friend of yours. You had better open it at once, my dear, and see if there is any message to Mr. Sparrow."

She handed the letter back to Elisabeth, who, excited beyond words by its arrival, and deeply indignant at the treatment it had received, crushed it into the pocket of her dress.

"I don't think there can be any message to Mr. Sparrow," she said. "Mr. Holland couldn't know that I know him."

"My dear, the British chaplain is always, or ought always to be known by every member of his congregation. Oblige me, Elisabeth, by opening that letter. Mr. Sparrow, as you hear, is anxious for news of Mr. Holland."

Thus adjured, Elisabeth drew forth the sacred epistle (she had meant to read it with a thousand emotions in the privacy of her own room), and slowly opened it. It was a thick letter; its thickness had added to her excitement. What could Mr. Holland, if Mr. Holland it indeed were, have to say to her at such length? She opened it, and, to her confusion, an enclosure, addressed to the Reverend James Sparrow, fell out. Mrs. Sparrow instantly pounced upon it.

"My dear," she said, "what did I tell you? Believe me, Elisabeth, I never speak without reason. Another time you will trust me, I hope."

But Elisabeth was already lost in the perusal of her own letter. It consisted, as she saw at a glance, of a few lines only:

"DEAR MISS VERRINDER: I venture to presume on our very slight acquaintance to request you to forward the enclosed letter to Mr. Sparrow, the resident English chaplain at Schlossberg. You will, I think, have no difficulty in ascertaining his address, of which I am, for the moment, unfortunately ignorant. A letter I was expecting from him must have missed me, I imagine, in my wanderings; and as it is of some importance for me to communicate with him at once, I shall be exceedingly indebted to you if you will do me the favor to see that the enclosed reaches his hands. I hope before long to thank you in person, as I expect to be in Schlossberg in about a fortnight.

"Yours very faithfully,

"ROBERT HOLLAND.

"P.S.—As I hope so soon to see you, give yourself no anxiety for the moment, I beg, about our little money transaction. It can perfectly well wait to be arranged till we meet."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. CLEAVER MAKES HERSELF DISAGREEABLE.

The meal was over, and Elisabeth escaped up the long flights of stairs to her own room, to put away her precious letter. Precious beyond words—very literally beyond words, since of words in it there were so few, and those for the most part so insignificant. But since most of my readers (presumably) have once been seventeen, the fact need not be insisted on that at that unwise age the significance of a letter may, on occasion, altogether outstrip the importance of its actual contents. Precious beyond words, then, to our Elisabeth, from the dotting of the first *i* to the crossing of the last *t*; yet with an element of disquietude in it, too, that she felt she should discover when she had time to consider it with more attention. For the moment

she could only glance through it once more, then fold it up, and put it away carefully in her writing-case before running down-stairs again.

"My dear," Mrs. Sparrow had said, as she left the dining-room, "oblige me by coming down to the salon this evening. It looks ill, Elisabeth, for a young girl to make herself singular by altogether absenting herself from the society of the house. And bring some work with you, my dear, or some knitting; you idle away far too much time, I fear, in unprofitable dreaming over your books."

"I can come to-night," said Elisabeth, rather disconsolately. "I generally do my class preparation in the evening, but I have finished it to-night. I don't know how to knit, and I don't like work; but I will bring down what I have."

Elisabeth then dutifully hunted up a thimble, a pair of scissors, and a scrap of white embroidery embrowned by age, and slowly descended the stairs again to the little salon. It was a room that had few attractions for her.

Left to herself, she would never have gone into it, so much did she prefer the silence, the solitude, the freedom, the dear companionship of books in her attic. But there was no element of considered rebellion in the girl's nature; when she rebelled it was in mere impulse and passion of the moment. Obediently, therefore, she went down to spend a long evening, whose dulness, she decided beforehand, would be extreme. Before she opened the door she knew the scene that awaited her, and her knowledge was not disappointed: a whist-table being prepared in one corner; a suppressed giggling in another; five ladies engaged on various tapestries; the good little daily governess, who boarded at Frau Werner's, correcting a pile of exercises, to save candle-light in her own room; Mrs. Sparrow making holland blouses at a centre-table (occasionally she creaked an enormous pair of scissors, and tore a breadth with a screech that set everyone's teeth on edge); Mrs. Cleaver, with her dog on her lap, crocheting an immense fleecy shawl; Mary Sparrow knitting stockings, and the young German student of divinity at her side, watching the movement of her plump pink fingers. Elisabeth knew it all by heart, and in her heart cared to speak to no one but the little governess, with whom she had made acquaintance, and who, too busy for conversation, smiled and nodded as the girl passed by. In the centre of the room Mr. Sparrow was standing up, talking

in a loud resonant voice that commanded the society. As a fact, he was only addressing his wife, but he saw no reason why he should modulate his usual commanding tones. Anyone might hear—nay, profit by what he was saying. In his hand he held the Vicar of Thornton Briar's letter.

"Holland can't come here," he was saying. "He writes that he wishes to be wherever I am, and begs me to secure him a room. The house is full; I have just spoken to Frau Werner, and there is not a room to be had. He should have written a month ago. He is sure," referring to the letter, "that wherever we are must be comfortable and economical, and hopes to be of use to me on Sunday whenever his health permits. He might have waited to say that, I think, till he was asked, if he wants, as I suppose, to occupy my pulpit. I prefer, as a rule, to occupy my own pulpit; and he is very little of a preacher, to my mind."

"Oh, he can hardly have meant that, my dear," said Mrs. Sparrow, intent on her blouses; "he only meant, I dare say, that he would be happy to read the lessons occasionally. He never struck me as a forward person."

Mr. Sparrow put the letter in his pocket.

"You're mistaken, my dear," he said. "Holland has as good an opinion of himself as any man living. I have not a word to say against him as a brother clergyman; he is excellent, excellent in a parish, but no great preacher, to my mind, though I know he thinks himself one. Besides, I don't know that I could trust him in my pulpit. I by no means hold with all his views, as you are aware, my dear; I have always disapproved of them, indeed. Holland has sound judgment; I don't deny him that, and I don't believe he will ever go to extremes; but I have heard various things about his doings lately that are by no means consistent with the truth as it has been delivered to us. I intend to speak about it to him when he comes."

"Mr. Holland!" said Mrs. Cleaver, suddenly joining in the conversation. "Now, what Mr. Holland is that, I should like to know? *I* knew a Mr. Holland once, and thought very little of him, I can assure you."

No one immediately answered. Mrs. Cleaver—she was the widow of an officer who had spent most of his term of service in India—was a little round-featured woman of about sixty, with smooth bands of hair under a widow's cap, rosy cheeks, and a small thin-lipped mouth, that

emitted a sort of pinched, unemphatic voice and pronunciation. Though small, she bore herself with dignity; her widow's cap, one of the more pronounced kind, had long floating weepers; the black crape of her gown was relieved by very wide-hemmed muslin bands, and a good many shining jet ornaments. Frau Werner, whose varied experience enabled her to characterize her visitors with some precision, did not like Mrs. Cleaver. "That woman," she said on one occasion, "I think she have a devil in her; heaven forgive me such a word, but that is so. She looks so rosy, she speaks so softly, and then you find she holds, and holds, and holds; yes, it is like a devil. 'But dear Frau Generalinn,' I say to her sometimes, 'one must let go a little; we must all of us now and then let go.' But no, she has her idea, and she holds. And Mrs. Sparrow, she have her idea, too, but she is like wax by Mrs. Cleaver; and that is how it goes on. Mrs. Sparrow, she likes to pull, and Mrs. Cleaver, she holds, and with both in the house together, there is no peace—never!" No one at once answered Mrs. Cleaver now. Mr. Sparrow, who disapproved of her strongly—she had the habit of attending the German Lutheran Church to evade his ministrations—glared at her for a moment, and dropping into an armchair, took a pamphlet from his pocket and began to read. Mrs. Sparrow gathered herself together, then said with dignity:

"The Reverend Robert Holland, Vicar of Thornton Briars, is my husband's particular friend."

"The Reverend Robert Holland—oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Cleaver; "mine was the Reverend Robert Holland, too, curate at the church I attended for twenty years. A very reverend young man indeed: embezzled the church funds, and would have made off with them, no doubt, but that the Rector found it out in time. The matter was hushed up. I should not have hushed it up; I should have had the young fellow tried and convicted, curate or no curate; but parsons always hang together, I find. I heard of the affair, though it was kept as much as possible in the dark, and other people would have heard of it also if I had not unfortunately been starting for India almost the day it happened. Nothing would have pleased me better than to sift it to the bottom. The young man disappeared, however; I don't know what became of him. I have very little doubt this is the same; all the clergy who come abroad have something shady in the back ground, I

believe. No doubt it is the same. Pinch, come here, sir!"

Pinch, a dog of very ingenuous mind, had jumped from his mistress's knee, and was now creating a diversion in the room by making the round of the company, erecting himself in a begging posture with his front paws in the air before each individual in turn. Begging was his only accomplishment, and he exercised it in the face of constant disappointment with a simple and confiding perseverance that could not but touch the least susceptible heart. Everybody liked Pinch, and one well-meaning old lady gave him a cough-lozenge, which Pinch, with a true sense of delicacy, swallowed without a single protest. These friendly demonstrations quite diverted public attention from the rather heated conversation going on in the middle of the room.

"No such thing!" Mr. Sparrow was saying in loud and abrupt tones, in reply to Mrs. Cleaver's last remark. "You are in error, madam. The Vicar of Thornton Briars is *my* friend, a clergyman of the highest merit and the most unsullied reputation. Allow me to contradict once and for all, and in the most emphatic manner, this most scandalous story, and to express my surprise that your undisguised animosity to the Church should degenerate into reckless and mendacious gossip about an individual."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Cleaver. "Allow me to express my surprise at your extraordinary manner of addressing me, sir. You accuse me of animosity to the Church, but I nevertheless see no reason why a man should not be a gentleman though he is a parson. Reckless and mendacious gossip! There may be more than one Robert Holland in the world; I don't say there is not; the name is of no such great distinction! But do you suppose I invented the story? Pinch, come here, sir. We will go upstairs. I object to the company in which I find myself."

"Hush—sh," said Mrs. Sparrow, waving her hand. "Allow me, Mrs. Cleaver; there are young people present; such heated language is unseemly, to say the least of it. Elisabeth, my love, come and sit by me. You have brought your work, I see; that is right. Not very useful, though, my dear, is it? Suppose you go on with one of these Christian Mission blouses, whilst I read aloud the last report of the mission to you and Mary. Herr Nauders might like to listen, too; it will improve his English, besides being deeply interesting in itself."

Elisabeth, standing behind Mrs. Sparrow's chair, had been listening with vivid interest to the foregoing conversation. For the first time she regarded Mr. Sparrow with something approaching approval. His reply to Mrs. Cleaver seemed to her a model of just and direct rebuke. How could people be so wicked? she wondered. Mrs. Cleaver disliked the English chaplain and his wife; because she disliked them, she tried to vilify their friend. Elisabeth took the seat and the needlework indicated by Mrs. Sparrow, but she did not hear a word of the reading that worthy woman immediately began in a more than semi-audible voice for the benefit of her immediate neighbors. Elisabeth felt an absolute unconcern in regard to the little African heathen in whose behalf she was pricking her fingers. She sewed a seam up on the wrong side, and began unpicking it in extreme impatience. She could have embraced Frau Werner, who, appearing in the doorway, came that moment to her rescue.

"Miss Verrinder—" she said. "Ah, you are there. Your good friend Baroness von Leuwine is in my parlor, and would wish to speak to you."

Elisabeth threw down the blouse and jumped up, letting her scissors fall with a crash to the ground. Mrs. Sparrow looked up severely.

"My dear," she said, "you interrupt me."

"I beg your pardon," said Elisabeth, abashed. "I did not mean to disturb you. Please don't wait for me; I think I must go to the Baroness if she wants to speak to me." And, fearful of further detention, she slipped away and out of the room. Mrs. Sparrow looked after her and shook her head.

"A thoughtless girl, I fear," she said. "We will proceed, however. But where, my dear Mary, is Herr Nauders?"

"I think, mamma, he thought you had finished reading," said the blushing Mary, "so he went away. He doesn't understand English very well, you know. And I think, mamma, the other people don't like our reading aloud very much; it seems to disturb them."

Mrs. Sparrow closed her mission report. "It need disturb no one," she said. "All are welcome to listen, and all would profit by what they hear. But under the circumstances, Mary, we had better, perhaps, postpone our reading. I should like Elisabeth to hear the close of the report. She is a very thoughtless child, and it might make

her reflect. As for Herr Nauders, you must talk to him, Mary; he is anxious to learn English, I know, and should be grateful for the opportunity to blend instruction with edification."

Elisabeth, meanwhile, had found the Baroness in Frau Werner's stuffy little parlor, surrounded by that worthy woman's three flaxen-tailed and pinafored children. Madame von Leuwine was one of those benevolent, charming people who like children, *quand même*, and who go through the world with their pockets full of excellent things to attract them as surely as honey attracts bees. Mina, Lina, and Lotte were each in turn thrusting a fat arm up to the elbow in a sort of capacious wallet hanging at the Baroness's side, and shouting with glee at the treasure which each grimy little fist displayed as it unclosed. The entrance of their mother with Elisabeth somewhat checked this innocent pastime.

"St—st!" she said, pulling them away one by one, and rubbing their sticky fingers and noses with a substantial linen handkerchief. "No, I say, Lotte, no: come here, Lina; come here, Mina; is that how we behave to the gracious Baroness? Let the gracious lady be, I tell you; she has had enough of you; she has had too much of you; she will have no more of you; she wishes to talk to Miss Verrinder. There, run to Käthchen; she may give you some stewed pears before you go to bed."

Elisabeth had come in with a flush on her cheek, a shy smile in her eyes. The Baroness had foreseen rightly; she had made the girl love her in the fortnight they had spent together. She went up to her friend now, and sitting down close beside her on the little leather sofa, put her hand in hers. The action pleased Madame von Leuwine. She took the girl's hand in both her own, patting it kindly.

"So," she said; "and how are we getting on? Not too much study, eh? Not too many hours at the books?"

"Oh, no," said Elisabeth. "I like study. I like reading better than anything."

"Yes, yes," said the Baroness, "we know all about that; but all work and no play makes Jack a dull girl—a dull girl," she repeated, still patting Elisabeth's hand. "And girls have no business to be dull. They have to make themselves agreeable; they have to talk, and flirt, and be amiable, and keep us older ones from growing rusty. Yes, yes, that is quite as essential as going to college or to

classes, as is the fashion in these days. We must have a little play as well. And that is why I am here this evening. What do you say to going to the opera to-morrow night?"

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, her eyes widening; "I have never been to the opera in my life."

"Never been to the opera?" cried the Baroness. "Why, how old are you? Seventeen, eighteen, and never been to the opera? Why, I began to go when I was five years old. You will come with me to-morrow evening. I have taken a box. The opera here is not bad, not at all; on the contrary, it is rather good. Come to dinner at half-past five. You have a white frock; that will do, and come in your hat, you know. You can take it off if you find it too warm."

The Baroness patted Elisabeth's hand again, and gave a little straightening pull to the bow at the girl's throat. "And how are you getting on!" she said again. "You are happy here? You like it. Oh, don't be afraid of Frau Werner there; she will tell you it is not everyone who likes her pension."

"Ah, no?" cried the poor woman. "I could sometimes say it is no one. I say to myself sometimes: 'Why, then, do they come?' Occasionally I say it to them. They are not all like Miss Elisabeth here; she never complains."

"But I do like it," said the girl. "I am very happy here, very. I was never so happy before! Everybody is kind, and I can do almost what I like. Oh, I wish I could stay here for ever!"

"So, you do what you like?" said the Baroness, rising to go. "And what does our lady chaplainess—what does Mrs. Sparrow say to that?"

"She is very kind," said Elisabeth, loyally. "I don't so much mind people interfer—speaking to me when they are kind."

"Well, well," said the Baroness, "you are a good child. You can be trusted, I think." She looked at Elisabeth with kind and shrewd eyes, while she arranged her voluminous cloak. "You can be trusted, I think, not to get into any mischief, eh?"

"I don't know," said Elisabeth, reddening a little. "I don't want to get into any mischief; I don't think I know how."

"And that is just why you will not," said the Baroness, nodding at her kindly; "never a girl but knows how to get

into mischief if she has a mind to. And now good-by, my dear. I have two words to say to Frau Werner here before I go. Don't forget half-past five to-morrow—punctual."

Elisabeth did not return to the salon after leaving the Baroness; she absolved herself from further duty in that direction; she slipped past the door and fled swiftly up the stairs to her own chamber. It was all dark and silent there. Elisabeth did not immediately light the little lamp by which it was her custom to pursue her evening studies. She groped her way to the window, and drawing back the chintz curtain that hung before it, threw the casement open to the mild October night. It was quite dark now; the latest sunset twilight was fallen dead behind the hills; only the stars shone white and dim in a misty sky. Cool breaths of air touched her cheek; there was the sound of a distant piano and singing, the sudden rattle now and again of a passing carriage in the street far below, the vague murmur of a town not yet settled down into the silence of night; here and there a light gleamed from some upper window. Elisabeth, half kneeling, half crouching on a chair by the window, her arms resting on the sill, looked out on it all. Her heart was beating quickly, she could not tell why; partly still, perhaps, with her rapid flight up the stairs; partly with the sentiment of the wide life spread there below her, palpitating beneath those darkling city roofs; partly, perhaps—partly with the uncertain sense of some event drawing near; an event that should have thrilled her surely with a sense of unimagined happiness, but for a stray disquietude or pain that made her shrink, rather, from dwelling on it at all.

A girl's heart is dark to all, it is said; but to no one more than to herself. Elisabeth had said truly to the Baroness she did not know how to get into mischief; the tortuous paths by which some girls enter on their experience of life were inconceivable by her. She was both innocent and ignorant; so much, at least, her suppressed, convent-like existence had done for her; more, she had the touch of indifference, the trick of scorn, that a rigid training can impart to a naturally refined and religion-seeking mind. Her school-world had been no convent, after all; a dozen girls would put their heads together to whisper their silly secrets, their foolish chatter, and Elisabeth had held aloof from it all. But although, through ignorance or innocence, or principle, or natural gifts, so

various is the medley that finally determines human action, Elisabeth was incapable of getting into mischief in the ordinary meaning of the word, she had an uneasy consciousness at that very moment of being in some sort of entanglement, out of which she did not clearly see her way. The consciousness had been upon her ever since she read Mr. Holland's note ; and presently it so far gained the upper hand that she closed the window, lighted her lamp, and took out the letter to read it again. In a fortnight Mr. Holland would be in Schlossberg ; and then, he wrote, he would expect the settlement of her debt. Elisabeth was happily unvisited by the sense that a little more experience would have given her, that after such a letter she ought to do no less than send off the hundred-mark note by return of post ; still less did it occur to her that Mr. Holland should never have mentioned the matter at all. She still believed implicitly every word that was said to her ; she was incapable of reading between the lines —happily, I say ; for the fact was that of that famous hundred-mark note not a coin remained.

When at the end of her fortnight's stay at the Kaiserhof Elisabeth's bill had been presented to her, she had gazed at it in dismay. Mrs. Verrinder, it is true, had foreseen that in giving her consent to Elisabeth's remaining at the hotel her niece's expenses might probably exceed the remnant of pocket-money she supposed might be in Elizabeth's purse at the end of her journey. But instead of forwarding more money to the girl, she had simply written to the Baroness, begging her to make good any deficit for the present ; adding that all these matters should be arranged when Elisabeth was settled with Frau Werner. Of this letter Elisabeth knew nothing ; since the Baroness, naturally supposing Mrs. Verrinder had herself explained the arrangement to her niece, and having fifty other affairs to occupy her mind, omitted to mention it. Hence Elisabeth's moment of trepidation, when the bill, with its long column of items and figures, its formidable total, lay before her. She opened her purse. It was slenderly furnished as any heroine's of romance ; still, what remained of the hundred-mark note, after her expenses to Schlossberg had been paid, was there intact. Elisabeth felt no hesitation about using it (how often afterwards she wondered and reproached herself that she had not done so) ; the money had been lent to help her out of a difficulty ; it did not occur to her at the moment that it

might be better to reserve so much of it as was left. Only what was left did not cover a third of the amount of the bill before her. Quivering with dismay, she gathered up the bill and her purse and ran off to the Baroness. To her relief Madame von Leuwine treated the whole thing as a matter of course.

"This is all the money you have?" she said, taking Elisabeth's purse; "but that is no matter at all. Your aunt begged me to advance what might be wanting. I shall settle with Herr Schmidt, and write to your aunt. Give yourself no further trouble, dear child."

The matter was settled in a moment, and Elisabeth's mind relieved. Only, of the famous hundred-mark not a coin remained.

This did not at first greatly trouble her. Repayment was not imminent, and the chances, she felt, were all in favor of something occurring to help her out of her difficulty. Considering of how scarce occurrence such chances are in this perverse world, it is surprising with what guileless trust mankind clings to its belief in them. It is a faith that survives the wrecks of a hundred creeds. Elisabeth knew it was dreadful to be in debt; she had not liked the thought of it at all; still, seeing no immediate way out of it, she set up her little shrine to fate (she would save her own money when she had any again; her uncle, who was always kind, would certainly some day send her a present); then let her dilemma lie lightly on her mind in the midst of her new happiness. But it was altogether different now. In a fortnight Mr. Holland would be in Schlossberg. As soon as he arrived—so much, at least, was clear to Elisabeth—he would expect his money to be repaid. How in the course of a single fortnight was she to procure the sum of a hundred marks?

Elisabeth sat down to face the problem in blank dismay; she had not an idea how to solve it, not one. Apply to her aunt? Certainly, with the stake and the executioner on one side, let us say, and Mrs. Verrinder on the other, Elisabeth might have found courage to relate the whole story; no less stirring emergency, and barely that, could have persuaded her to such a step. Her aunt could do her no particular harm, it is true; still, that was how she felt; and it is no part of the purpose of this narrative to conceal the fact that in certain directions Elisabeth was a sad coward! After all, there is no arguing about these matters. Some people expect to be drowned whenever

they enter a boat, others to be thrown out as soon as they get into a carriage ; it is a question of temperament, as one says. Appeal to the Baroness ? The idea crossed Elisabeth's mind, but she put that aside also. The Baroness had won her affection, but the girl had known her a few weeks only ; she recoiled from the thought of demanding her help in such a difficulty as this. It had been different with Mr. Holland. She had not asked him ; he himself had come unasked to her rescue in a moment of such extreme embarrassment, that Elisabeth was still unable to imagine how she would have extricated herself without his help. A warm flow of gratitude filled her heart at the thought ; how good he had been, how prompt and generous ! And perhaps he himself might know the want of money sometimes. Clergymen were often poor, that she knew ; and one so prompt and generous of help was not likely to be very rich. Yes, though he wrote so kindly, he might be glad to have the money back ; and how was she to repay him—how ?

Elisabeth sat facing the dark problem far into the hours of the night, but at the end of those hours it was dark as before ; and when she lay down to sleep at last, a weight was on the girl's heart for the first time since the commencement of her new life at Schlossberg.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BARONESS'S GARDEN-HOUSE.

Elisabeth awoke the next morning with the weight still upon her ; but she had almost forgotten it by five o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, when, standing before her little mirror, she was engaged in carefully drawing her best gown over her head, shaking out the folds, arranging the tucker—making her toilet, in short, before going out to dine with Madame von Waldorf and the Baroness.

Elisabeth, who held, on the whole, serious views of life, who loved books, who scorned what she would have called nonsense, had a most genuine love—it may as well be owned at once—of new and pretty clothes. It was a love that had found small indulgence so far ; a little school girl, her aunt had justly considered, no doubt, had no need of

an elaborate or distinguished wardrobe, and she had the habit of herself selecting her niece's frocks of durable and useful materials. On the solemn occasion of coming abroad, however, Elisabeth had been allowed a high white frock for evening wear that filled her with the most legitimate pride. It was well made, it fitted her, it was becoming ; and I should like to engage my reader's deepest sympathies in the joy of a heroine of seventeen who for the first time in her life possesses a really well-made and becoming frock. At the risk of incurring the reproach for her and for myself of the most frivolous of tastes, I venture to say that, within its own limits, no joy can be so complete or so entirely without a drawback. Elisabeth, contemplating herself in the glass with the most anxious scrutiny, assured herself that she was not so ugly, not so plain—no . . . She pulled a blue ribbon out of her drawer, and tied it round the thick brown locks whose picturesque fashion of arranging themselves made the despair of her life. What a discovery!—it suited her to perfection. Elisabeth almost trembled to leave it there ; what would her aunt say to see her looking so gay, so frivolous, so well dressed, so pretty—the great word was out, Elisabeth felt herself pretty. She looked at herself again. She had one ornament of value with her, only one—a turquoise necklace that had belonged to her mother. She opened the case that held it, and took it out. It was an Oriental trinket, formed of heavy unset turquoises of irregular shape and size, each turquoise engraved with Eastern characters, and connected each with each by a fine gold chain. It was a valuable ornament, more valuable than Elisabeth, in her ignorance of such matters, was aware of ; she thought it, in fact, a trifle clumsy and heavy ; but she loved it, and valued it, nevertheless, for itself and for her mother's sake. She fastened it round her neck now. It looked charming on her white frock ; it matched the ribbon in her hair exactly ; it looked too charming. Instantly that strange, relentless tyrant that rules over young and sensitive souls, made its voice heard in Elisabeth's heart. There was something wrong in looking so pretty and so well dressed as that . . . With a sudden movement the girl untied the ribbon in her hair. She could not give up her necklace as a peace-offering—that was demanding too much ; but she pulled out the ribbon, and without looking at herself again, put on her Sunday hat, tied her cloak, and ran swiftly down the stairs into the street.

Madame von Waldorf's house was at no great distance from the Pension Werner, and Elisabeth, who had the habit of going to and from her classes by herself, thought nothing of walking there alone. She walked on quickly, for she was rather late. It was near sunset now ; the air was mild, the sky clear above the old city, with little high-floating clouds that turned to gold, then melted away into the blue. Elisabeth's spirits rose as she went. That business of making one's toilet with an accusing conscience nudging one's elbow is slightly depressing in its effects ; but Elisabeth, as she walked along, forgot it in the cheerful prospect of the evening before her. Yet her heart sank again a little as she rang at Madame von Waldorf's door. The girl was no longer shy with the Baroness, but she was never altogether at her ease with Emilia. Madame von Waldorf imposed a little on our heroine. Her beauty, her air of good society, her unembarrassed ease, had the effect of making Elisabeth feel a dull little school-girl at her side. She did not like to feel like a school-girl ; hence a certain trepidation as she rang the bell and followed the servant through the hall into a long salon opening on to a terrace and garden beyond.

It was the most agreeable room in Madame von Waldorf's agreeable house. Her husband's literary and scientific tastes had led him to begin the collection of a large library, and the ample and lofty room, lined in part with brown-backed or vellum-bound volumes, had something of the severer aspect of a study ; but its sunny outlook on the garden, its long windows opening on to the terrace, had induced Emilia to use it habitually both as a sitting and reception room, contrasting its severity with pictures and tables strewn with the paper-bound literature of the day, with her piano and embroideries and flowers. Charming as it was, however, it was not the room that Elisabeth, in her acquaintance with the house, had learnt to prefer. There was an apartment upstairs, looking out upon an umbrageous corner of the garden, that the Baroness called her studio ; the scene, in fact, of her moments of industry and her moments of relaxation. Here she modelled in clay, which was her pleasure ; here she wrote letters innumerable, and attended to the accounts of her school for young girls, which was her business ; and she might have found it hard to decide whether in business or pleasure she found the larger entertainment. Here Elisabeth felt at home and at ease. She had visited it more than once ;

for the Baroness, constantly on the look-out for new subjects, had begun to model the girl's head in clay.

"You are not a beauty, my dear child," she said to her one day; "your glass has told you so much, no doubt. But your face is not amiss, not at all; and you have a good head—a good head, and something in it. Hold it up in the world, and don't be afraid. There is nothing in life to be afraid of, my dear, if you would only believe it. What are you afraid of, eh?"

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, coloring and laughing in her shy fashion. But she was no longer much afraid of the Baroness, at any rate; she liked sitting to her and with her; she was sorry that the servant showed her now into the room downstairs, where she had hardly yet been. The man, opening the door, allowed her to enter, then retired, saying he would tell his mistress, and Elisabeth advanced alone down the long apartment. The western light shone in her eyes, and she thought at first the room was empty. In a moment, however, she perceived that she was not alone. Gordon Temple was seated with his back to her in a big arm-chair, and beside him was little Ida, engaged in her favorite entertainment of diving her hand deep into one pocket and another of his coat.

"You've got it! I know you've got it!" she was saying. "If you don't give it to me in one, free, six, two minutes, I'll never kiss you nor love you again!"

"Never again? Oh, come now, I don't believe that."

"No, never again," cried the child, capering round him. "I shall perfectly detest you, I can tell you! When I put on my new frock I shall run away, away, that you mayn't never see me in it at all."

"Then I shall run after you and catch you, so!" said her cousin, suddenly starting up and capturing her. As she struggled, screaming and laughing, in his arms, she caught sight of Elisabeth, and all at once became preternaturally grave. Her cousin, turning to see the reason, set her down on the ground and went forward to meet Elisabeth.

"You come to a house full of unpunctual people, Miss Verrinder," he said. "The Baroness told us she should be late. She has gone to one of her school committees, and as everything has been going wrong lately, she foresaw it would take some time to set matters right. And my cousin Emilia has only this moment come in. She commissioned me to entertain you while she dresses for din-

ner." He looked at her rather vaguely. "Won't you take off your hat or cloak or something? or would you rather come into the garden for a quarter of an hour?"

"Yes, please—the garden," said Elisabeth, rather hurriedly. This prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Temple appeared to her in the last degree alarming. The two had met not infrequently at the Kaiserhof, but they had exchanged hardly a dozen words, and if the truth must be told, Elisabeth had given this new acquaintance hardly a dozen thoughts. He was the sort of person, so she would have expressed herself, with whom she had no concern. It is true she had no knowledge of what sort of person he was, beyond, vaguely, the fact that he gave lectures; but he was young; he had the air and fashion (the lectures notwithstanding) of a man in society; he sometimes wore a flower in his buttonhole; he was a remote young man, in short—one of that order of young men who, to Elisabeth's apprehension, concerned her about as much as if they inhabited the planet Mars. What on earth, was her instant reflection now, was she to talk about? The garden, visited by the sunset light, seemed easier ground than the salon; at least, they would move about; they could speak of the sky and the weather. They stepped out on to the terrace; three steps, descending, led from it to a straight path that intersected the enclosure, and was interrupted by a central pond kept fresh by some hidden source. Other intersecting paths divided the garden four-square, a parterre in each division, a statue here and there, here and there a moss-grown seat, a shady alley down one side, a sort of garden-house, or closed summer-house, in one angle of the wall. Beyond the outer boundary rose other trees, their thin branches hung with yellow leaves against the gray-blue sky; for the grounds of one of the college buildings lay adjacent to Madame von Waldorf's garden, and gave it an air of seclusion unusual in a city. For a city garden, indeed, it had a singular charm of peace and tranquil calm. Elisabeth, who had never been in it before, though she had looked down on the shady alley from the Baroness's room, could have fancied herself miles distant from the Pension Werner. The charm gained on her; she forgot that she ought to make remarks about the weather and the sky; she walked on in silence. She and her companion strayed down the central walk, and stood gazing for a minute at the pond. The little gold-colored clouds, turning rosy and then melting

away, were still drifting slowly overhead, and were reflected in the clear pool at their feet. Other gleams of red and gold were there, darting to and fro. Gordon poked a stick into the water.

"These are Ida's gold fish," he said; "she might come and feed them for our entertainment." He raised his voice: "Ida!" he called once or twice.

"She must have run upstairs to her mother," he said, as there came no response; "and I have no bread in my pocket." He looked at Elisabeth doubtfully, rather as if he thought her another child that had to be entertained. "Let us go on," he said; "you have not seen the garden before? Well, it is not very large, as you perceive; we can visit it all before dinner."

They turned down another walk, bordered with rose-trees, still pink and white and fragrant, with an occasional stone pillar supporting a bust or a figure. Before one of these Gordon paused.

"Here is my autograph," he said, pointing to some roughly cut letters in the stone. "Now, that should be looked on with respect, as destined to be shown one day as the autograph of a great man. That was my idea, at least, when I cut it here some ten years ago; perhaps my views have changed a little since then. Ten years make a good deal of difference in one's point of view, as you will discover when you are as old as I am, Miss Verrinder."

Elisabeth looked at him, laughed a little, then colored and looked down, embarrassed.

"Don't you agree with me?" he said; "ah, that is because you have no experience yet; you don't know. You don't know what it feels like to be an old fellow. You have all the happiness of youth in your hands yet."

"I don't know," said Elisabeth; "I mean, I shouldn't have thought you so very old," she continued, with awkward naïveté.

Her companion laughed. "Well, I feel pretty old," he said. "Ten years ago, I remember, I used to find everyone older than myself; now I seem to find a good many people younger; you can have no idea what a difference that makes! Still, there are people older than I am, no doubt."

"Besides," Elisabeth continued, paying no great heed to this last remark, "I don't see the use of being great when one is very young; I mean it is a sort of accident;

I mean it is better to be great after a long life—I know what I mean, but I can't express myself very clearly."

"Oh, you express yourself very well," said her companion, good-naturedly; "and what you say is very true. Only the length of life is comparative, you know; ten years count as much as sixty sometimes. By-the-bye, wouldn't you like to see how Madame von Leuwine has immortalized us all, big folk and little? She has put us all into that summer-house there. I tell her it is like an Etruscan tomb, and that she has buried us all before our time, but she insists upon it that we are made immortal. She is doing your head, is she not? I was certain she wouldn't let you off; it is astonishing how many patient victims she finds."

"I like it," said Elisabeth, flushing, and loyal to the Baroness.

"Oh, she likes it, too," said Gordon, smiling; and to most young girls might have made some further remark that, leading to an agreeable flirtation, would have insured sufficient entertainment for the next quarter of an hour. But nothing could well be more difficult than to institute even an incipient flirtation with Elisabeth. She took everything said with such absolute sincerity, so entirely *au pied de la lettre*, that a flirtation hardly suggested itself with her, more than it might with St. Agnes or St. Dorothea, should one happen to meet either of them out walking with her roses or her lamb. Those saints might probably be considered dull company in a modern drawing-room, and I am not prepared to say that Elisabeth's gift of honesty and lack of repartee were calculated to enliven society. She made no reply now to Gordon's last remark, and followed him in silence as he opened the door and led the way into the little garden-house that has already been mentioned as occupying one corner of the garden.

"Here we all are," he said; "here, Miss Verrinder, is the family mausoleum. I must explain to you that this temple of art is the joy and pride of the Baroness; she has arranged it all herself. It is a pity now that you are not a cousin, not even the fraction of a cousin, for then you might find a place here too. The remotest fraction would be sufficient."

Windows facing to the north and east sufficiently illuminated the little building, which was of perfectly simple construction and arrangement. It had, in fact, been de-

vised by the Baroness some years previously, as a fitting place in which to deposit mementos, by her own hand, of her nephew and his wife, and of everyone belonging to them who could be persuaded to sit to her. The busts were in terra-cotta, and, by a judicious arrangement of light and of arched recesses, were shown to the best advantage. Mottoes ran round the walls; wreaths were suspended here and there. The whole place was essentially German in character; only a Teutonic mind, perhaps, could have conceived it; but Elisabeth (she would have been in sympathy, indeed, with anything done by the Baroness) gazed in admiration, and though not devoid of a latent sense of humor, was unable to perceive why her companion seemed disposed to take the whole thing humorously.

"Here we all are," he said again, looking round; "and we all think everyone flattered but ourselves. As for me, I can never persuade myself I am quite such an ugly fellow as Madame von Leuwine makes me out. Let me see, whom will you recognize? There is my cousin Emilia, you see; that is not such a success, to my mind, as little Ida here. That, I always tell the Baroness, is the best thing she has done. Then here are my cousin Otto and his wife, and the Baroness herself; we insisted on having her own portrait——"

"Who is that?" said Elisabeth, with a sudden start.

"That? Oh, that," said Gordon, "is Madame von Waldorf's half-brother, Robert Holland. It was done some years ago, when he was in Vienna for a month. It is not very good. Madame von Leuwine wished to include him in her series of the family, but he didn't much care about sitting, I fancy, and it is no great result, as you see."

Elisabeth had colored deeply. "Madame von Waldorf's half-brother?" she said; "I didn't know she had one. Do you mean Mr. Holland, the clergyman?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," answered her companion. "Do you know him?"

"Yes—no; I met him on board the boat coming here. He was very kind to me," said Elisabeth, with some incoherence. "I didn't know Madame von Waldorf had a half-brother; I never heard her speak of him."

"Oh, that's likely enough; they are not very intimate," said Gordon; "they have not met for years; their lives have lain altogether apart. So you know Robert Hol-

land?" he went on, after a pause. "You are a judge, then. What do you think of the Baroness's work?"

"I suppose it is like," said Elizabeth, hesitating; "I recognized the likeness. But it is not really like him. He looks different now; at least, he is older, and he has been ill; and then he has a—a much finer face. I think he has a very fine face. That face is not fine. It looks—it looks mean. Oh, it is not a good likeness."

Her companion contemplated the bust in silence for a moment. "The likeness——" he began, and checked himself. "The Baroness is a very good artist, I suspect," he said, with some apparent inconsequence; "but that was done some years ago. Faces have a trick of changing; I wonder you should have recognized it at all; he must certainly have changed greatly since then. Shall we go back again now? I should think dinner must be ready by this time."

He closed the door of the little house behind him, and they traversed the garden in silence. Elisabeth's thoughts were absorbed by her discovery. Once or twice she opened her lips as if to speak; but the words were apparently not ready, for she relapsed again into silence. All at once she stood still, facing her companion on the lowest of the three steps that led up to the terrace.

"How is Mr. Holland Madame von Waldorf's half-brother?" she inquired; "they are not at all alike. He is much older."

"No, they are not at all alike," said Gordon, a little dryly. "Captain Holland, Madame von Waldorf's father and my uncle, was twice married. His first wife, Robert Holland's mother, was English; his second, as I dare say you know, was German. Robert is about eight years older than my cousin Emilia."

"It is so strange——" began Elisabeth. "It is strange, I mean, that I should first have met Mr. Holland on board the boat, and then Madame von Waldorf here—I never knew anything so strange."

"Ah, yes, that is how it is," said her companion; "the world is at once so large and so small, you see, that strange things of that sort are always happening. People are always knocking their heads together in unexpected ways, or else they drift apart and never meet for years. Robert was in Vienna some ten or eleven years ago, but since then we have hardly seen him—Madame von Waldorf not at all."

They were slowly mounting the steps of the terrace, and Elisabeth did not at once answer. "Madame von Waldorf——you must all be glad, then," she said in a moment, however, "that he is coming to Schlossberg this winter. You will see more of him."

Gordon rubbed his hair off his forehead. "Yes, yes," he said; "we may perhaps see more of him. Madame von Leuwine has come back, I see, Miss Verrinder; there she is, talking to my cousin Emilia. Let us go in and make the most of having been kept waiting for dinner."

They passed through the long open window into the salon. The Baroness, in an old-fashioned brown shawl, and with her bonnet in her hand, was seated with her back to them, addressing Madame von Waldorf with some energy.

"People have no sense—none at all," she was saying. "Five of the girls happen to have red petticoats instead of blue. 'Dear Frau Meyer,' I say, 'what does it matter if they have canary-colored petticoats? Do leave the poor children in peace.' 'It was your own rule, Baroness,' she says, very much in a huff; 'rules are rules, I always say.' 'Good heavens! Frau Meyer,' I answer, 'a petticoat is not a moral precept. I say, let there be uniformity in dress, and then there can be no jealousies and heart-burnings; and blue is a good serviceable color for a petticoat. But the girls don't walk about in their petticoats, and I dare say some of them wear their mothers' old ones.' Then Lina comes in. 'Tell me, Lina,' I say, 'isn't that your mother's old petticoat?' Upon which she begins to laugh. 'Yes, gracious,' she says, 'it is two years old; my mother cut it short for me last vacation.' 'You see,' I say, turning to Frau Meyer. But I don't believe she did see. People have no sense."

"No; you and I monopolize it, Aunt Irma," said Emilia, smiling, and rising to greet Elisabeth. "I must apologize," she said to the young girl, "but I was detained at the last moment. Gordon has been entertaining you, I hope. Let me take your hat and cloak; dinner will be ready immediately."

"Heavens!" cried out the Baroness, turning round; "I had entirely forgotten about dinner and about the theatre. Happily, one has no need to dress—not at my age, at any rate. Here is someone who has made herself charming—charming for her first opera," giving Elisabeth a kiss on her forehead, and a friendly tap under the chin.

"So, so," she said, approvingly; "a pretty frock, and very becoming—no, never mind your hair, my dear; it does perfectly well; and where did you get this necklace, my dear child? It is exceedingly handsome; I never saw a handsomer one of the kind. What is this engraved on it? You don't know? Here, Gordon, look at Miss Verrinder's turquoises, and tell us what the inscription is."

She unfastened the necklace and laid it in the young man's hand. He took it to the window, and studied it for a moment, then returned it to Elisabeth with a smile.

"I don't know," he said, "what crime Miss Verrinder has been committing, but the inscription, which is in Persian, means, freely translated: 'I will atone.'"

"Ah, well!" said the Baroness, "that is no matter; we most of us have something to atone for, if we only live long enough. Put it on again, my dear, and be careful not to lose it; it is worth taking care of, I assure you. Emilia, I beg of you to go in to dinner. I shall be ready in a minute, but don't wait for me, or we may miss the overture. I would on no account have Elisabeth miss the overture to her first opera."

They walked to the theatre, arriving in good time for the overture, as it turned out; and the performance ending early, in the primitive Schlossberg fashion (to the end of her life Elisabeth would remember that the opera had been "Der Freischütz"), they walked home at its conclusion. Gordon accompanied the Baroness and his cousin; and after leaving Elisabeth at the Pension Werner, the three walked on through the quiet streets to Madame von Waldorf's house. Emilia asked her cousin to come in; bur he declined.

"I must get home," he said, "and see what's going on there. I declare to you, Emilia, that woman shows herself a greater fool every day. I never go home without wondering what mayn't have happened in my absence. It would never surprise me to find the house burned down."

"But, my dear Gordon, we must find you someone else," said Emilia; "we spoke of that before, you know."

"No, no; what's the good? My father doesn't dislike this one, and if we get another she might be just as bad, or worse. This one cooks pretty well, you know. But it's an execrable way of living; I wonder sometimes what the end of it will be." He thrust his hands into his pockets, and stared before him for a minute, then broke into a

laugh. "The end will be that I shall turn into a confounded old housekeeper," he said, "or else hang myself. Anyhow, I ought to be at home now, and I believe I shall give up going out in the evening altogether."

He nodded, and walked off at a rapid pace, but with a heavier heart than he often carried with him about the world. Gordon Temple had not in the least the habit of a heavy heart; he was in some respects young for his age; he had a fresh power of enjoyment, that is, that some men never have at all, that most men find a little blurred and dimmed by their thirtieth year. Gordon had knocked about the world as much as most men; but he had a happy trick of finding life extremely interesting, apart from his own personal concern in it, that contributes more, perhaps, to a man's final enjoyment than any other quality whatever. At present, however, life was simply becoming to him a horrible perplexity. He had a letter at that moment in his pocket, of which he had not spoken to his cousin, although he consulted her sympathy on most occasions. He had put it into his pocket, indeed, with the idea of showing it to her, and then decided it was useless. It was useless, he said to himself, to renew an old discussion; he had his own opinion of what he ought to do. The letter was from the Philological Society, that had already offered him an appointment in the East. He had refused, and the appointment had been given to another man; but a sudden illness having obliged this one to throw it up, a second letter had been addressed to Gordon, urging him to reconsider his decision and accept the offered post. The young man would have given a year of his life to do it; nothing could have suited him better, his tastes, his capacity, his pleasure. Finally, at the end of everything, he had an enthusiasm for his work that was the strongest passion of his life. He was a man of imagination, as the Baroness had said; and the study of the science of language, after the modern methods, with its long light thrown down the vista of the ages on to remotest darkness, on to the origins of religions and philosophies and thought, seemed to him more suggestive, appealed to and satisfied the imaginative side of his nature more than anything else in the world. He had received the letter twenty-four hours before, and he had not answered it yet. He was going to write another refusal, he said to himself; and the moment he said so, a conflict arose to postpone the final decision. He hated—he hated the thought of giving up the duty he had taken upon him-

self of looking after his father in their altered circumstances; he had no business, he protested, to throw the responsibility on anyone else. At the same time, he was compelled to own that his experiment so far had been something of a failure; that his father—each week that passed confirmed the supposition—might be better cared for and happier in his cousin's house than in his own. They were, other things set aside, not dependent on each other for companionship; they had lived too much apart for that; he had no misgivings on that score. Nevertheless, they had a particular friendship with, and affection for, one another; and, after all, he declared, who should look after his father but himself? He had argued the point with his cousin Emilia fifty times; he was not going to give it up now. Gordon was really an excellent fellow; he had a kind heart, a first-rate brain; but he was a trifle wrong-headed now and then—obstinate, as Madame von Waldorf had said; though, no doubt, from his own point of view, his obstinacy in this direction might very well wear the aspect of a virtue.

He clung to his obstinacy, at any rate. He wouldn't go away, he said to himself. He would go on giving lectures—he liked giving lectures—at Schlossberg for two-pence a month; that was the compendious fashion in which he summarized the salary paid him for his services by the authorities of Schlossberg. As for his present difficulty with the servant, when she had reached her lowest depth of stupidity, he would send her away, and find another stupider still. A variety of stupidity seemed all that it was possible to command, at the salary *he* was able to offer. Having arrived at this decision, he walked on quicker than before, through the respectable burgher quarters of the city, already settling down to their night's repose, across a bridge to a quiet old-fashioned street on the other side of the river that divided the town. A single lamp illuminated the street at one end; one or two lights shone from upper windows. Gordon turned a latch-key in a door about half-way down, and striking a match, lighted himself up a dark winding staircase to a second story. Here another door barred his way. He admitted himself by a second key, and passing through an anteroom, through a dining-room with a stove, a glass cupboard, a round table in the middle, and half a dozen chairs, he entered a tolerably spacious apartment, furnished as a library. The room—it had been arranged by Madame von Waldorf—had an

air of comfort beyond what might have been expected from the meagreness of the adjoining apartments. There were rugs on the floor; red curtains hung before the windows; the walls were lined with books; in the centre was a long table strewn with papers and pamphlets, with writing materials and a lamp. Beside the lamp, in an armchair set between the table and the white china stove, sat an old man wrapped in a long fur coat. He was nearly eighty, but his white hair was still thick, the glance of his gray-blue eye clear and intelligent. He bore an odd likeness to his son in his rather wide, blunt-featured face, but his expression, though shrewd, was simpler and more tranquil—the shrewdness of a man who has known the world, the simplicity that grows with age in those rare and select natures that have a fund of native simplicity to start with. An open book was on the table beside him; he had been reading, but he took off his glasses and looked up as the door opened and his son came in.

"Well, dad," he said, going up to the old man briskly enough, "how have you been getting on?" He looked round as he spoke, with an eye alert, in his present mood, to discover what might have gone amiss in his absence. He detected it in a flash, as his glance fell on his father's fur coat. "Whatever are you wearing that thing for?" he said. "You're not cold, are you? Why, there's no fire, apparently; there's no heat at all in the stove."

"Well, the fact is, Gordon," said his father, with a sort of humorous shame-facedness, "I let the fire out; and as the girl was gone to bed and my fur coat was handy, I put it on."

"Oh, Lord!" said the young man, with a groan, "I knew something would go wrong while I was away. Gone to bed? Why, what time does she go to bed? That's what I tell Emilia; that woman's always asleep. I've the greatest mind to ring her up."

"Nonsense," said his father; "do no such thing, Gordon. What does it matter? I shall be going to bed myself before long."

"Matter! It matters everything in the world," said his son, opening the little door of the stove and stirring the white ashes, "if you're cold. You are cold, aren't you?"

"A little—nothing to signify. It's a cold night, isn't it? That's what it is; I'm chilly, I suppose."

"It's not a particularly cold night, but if you're chilly, in heaven's name let us have a fire. We're not paupers,

that we should sit here in this squalid fashion. There's no particular difficulty in lighting a fire."

He left the room, and returning with the requisite materials, lighted up the stove in a minute. The old man sat leaning forward, holding up his delicate white hands to the flame that blazed up at the little square opening.

"Well, what's the news, Gordon?" he said at last, as his son did not speak. "How did the opera go off?"

"It's absurd; the thing is intolerable!" said Gordon, without noticing the question, and giving a log a kick with the heel of his boot. "If that woman can't do her work properly she *must* go. I shall speak to Emilia about it again to-morrow."

"No, no," said his father. "I won't have her sent away. She's a good soul enough; I like her, I tell you. I won't have her sent away because I let out the fire."

"Well——" said Gordon, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "Oh, the opera!" he said. "Yes, it was well enough. I often wonder how they get up those things so well in a place like this."

"They have a good tradition in these small German cities, that's how it is. They have a good many excellent traditions. I suppose they'll lose them by degrees, as Germany gets more centralized. Well," he went on, "and who did you see at your cousin's? The Baroness doesn't leave yet, does she?"

"No, no; not for another six weeks. Let me see," said the young man, rousing himself. "I saw no one but Emilia and the Baroness, and a Miss Verrinder—a rather pretty little girl the Baroness has taken up. You know how she goes about the world with a train of girls. I tell her she is a second St. Ursula; she has room for at least eleven thousand under the mantle of her capacious benevolence."

"Ah, she is a good woman," said his father. "I never knew a better, and I've known her for a good many years now. She was just the same as a girl. But for that matter, men and women never change; one finds that out as one grows old. Well, and what news did you hear?" he said again, with an infirm old man's craving for intelligence from the outer world. "What is going on?"

"I don't believe I heard any news at all," said his son, considering. "Yes, Robert Holland is to be here in a week or two. But that's not much in the way of news."

"Well, no," said the old man; "considering that he's

my nephew, or, at any rate, your mother's nephew, we couldn't well see less of a man than we do of him. He doesn't like us, I take it; and I've a notion, Gordon, you don't particularly like him."

"No, I don't," said Gordon, briefly. He turned round to the table, and pulling some writing materials toward him, began making notes for a lecture. His father watched him awhile in silence; then taking up his own book, began to read again. Presently Gordon threw down his pen, and flung himself round in his chair.

"It is intolerable—intolerable," he said, "that I can't go out without coming home to find you shivering with cold."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said his father. "You make me ashamed of you, Gordon, that you worry about such trifles. It's not the first time in my life I've sat without a fire. You'll make me think myself the most exacting old fellow."

He shut up his book, looked at his watch, and laying his hand on the stick that leaned against the arm of his chair, prepared to rise. He glanced again at his son as Gordon sat with his legs stretched out, staring into the fire.

"Do you know what I wish, Gordon?" he said.

"What, father?"

"I wish you would accept that travelling appointment that was offered you. It's still open, isn't it?"

"It's still open, because the man who accepted it resigned it again by the doctor's orders. They'd have me, no doubt, if I said I'd go."

"Then I wish you would say you'd go. You're wasting yourself here, that's the truth. And you're at the best years of your life, that shouldn't be wasted. Take my advice, and go."

He raised himself stiffly as he spoke, and stood leaning on his stick. He was a tall old man, taller than his son, who came to his side to help him to his room.

"Leave the lamp, please," he said, as the elder man prepared to turn it down; "I am coming back to work."

"Ah, that's a bad habit of yours, Gordon," said his father; "sitting up to work till all hours of the night and morning. It wears out eyes and brain both. I never did it, and I've read as many books in my time as most people. You don't sit up and worry now?" he said, standing still, looking at his son.

"Bless you, no," said Gordon, with a laugh, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Why, I don't worry half so much as you worry yourself about me."

When Gordon returned to the sitting-room, before setting to work again, he wrote a letter to his cousin Emilia.

"When I came in this evening," the letter ran, "I found the fire out, the maid in bed, and my father sitting in the cold. This sort of thing seems to me so abject, squalid, and intolerable, that I do not see how it is to be borne any longer. My father ought to have a personal attendant; I could hardly tell you how preposterous it sometimes seems to me, that he of all men should not have one; and to look after him properly myself is apparently beyond my power. Even if I were to give up everything else, so as to be always within his call, it would not be good for him. All that remains to him of active life comes to him in currents from the outer world; and, so far, I have more or less kept him in touch with what is going on. But I cannot be with him constantly, and yet come in with the freshness of new ideas and other lives. And to see me in any way fettered by his demands would make him miserable. I know my father well; and though it is not the common opinion, it is a fact that there are a few people with whose unselfishness one has to reckon, as one involuntarily reckons with the selfishness of the world at large. My father is one of the few; it is a positive fact that to add to the sum of his happiness I have to consider my own advantage.

"All this, however, is not new to you; we have discussed it, or something like it, a dozen times, I dare say. It is only a preface to my saying that, in regard to the many kind offers of assistance you have made me, I have been reconsidering the reasons that made me refuse the kindest of all. To be brief: the appointment to the East is still, I find, open. Will you, if I accept it, allow my father, during my absence, to reside in your house? No trouble that I can possibly prevent shall accrue to you; that I can promise. The pay offered by the society is so liberal that, together with the rent of this apartment, which I shall, I believe, have no difficulty in letting, I can at once secure an attendant for my father who will relieve me to a certain extent of anxiety. The rest of the pecuniary arrangements we can settle later on; and I may as well say at once that, unless I am allowed to settle them after my own

fashion, the whole thing will fall to the ground. The only thing I shall ask of you—besides everything else—is to supply the element of variety, of freshness in my father's life that is essential above everything else to a man of his age, cut off as he is from his former life and friends. You will be able to do it better than I can, for there is more movement and society in your house. He is fond, too, of Ida; I think he will be happy with you. It is a miserable business altogether. God knows whether I am deciding for the best. One can only do what one can.

"I shall not be leaving Schlossberg for another two months, certainly; and till then, or nearly till then, my father and I can be together. That will also doubtless suit you, as the Baroness does not, I believe, return to Vienna for another six weeks. I have no fear of any difficulty on my father's part. He wishes me—he has told me so—to accept this appointment; but he knows how impossible it would be for me to go now, and to leave him here alone; that I wouldn't even if I could. He will do anything he can to facilitate my arrangements, and there is no one, as you know, he would so willingly be with as with you. That it shall be no absolute inconvenience to you, I believe I might pledge myself; that it will entail on you a certain anxiety and responsibility is inevitable; but one of our queer ways in this queer world is to prove our friendship for, and reliance on, our friends by settling some of our burthens on their shoulders. I can only assure you I am now, as always,

"Your eternally obliged

"G. T."

"That," said Madame von Waldorf, passing the letter to the Baroness, "is quite the most sensible thing that Gordon can do. I am rejoiced. But how he bullies one!" she added, smiling.

"Poor boy!" said the Baroness, reading the letter; "he is miserable; he is torn one way and another; he doesn't know what he writes. He would like to be a daughter to his father, and he has not an idea how to set about it; how should he have? Certainly it is the wisest thing he can do, now that he has come to see it for himself."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW ONE DREAMS AT SEVENTEEN.

It might be held a question for nice decision whether the habit—more properly perhaps to be called the instinct, or let us say, the gift—of living by the imagination confers more pain or felicity on its possessor; whether those hours of fancy that precede an event, when everything, down to the smallest detail—the turn of a hand, the glance of an eye, the inflexion of a voice—is prefigured by the dreamer to suit his own idiosyncrasy, compensate for the dismal loss of the dream, when the event comes to pass and the reality is found to arrange itself by no means to meet this or that idiosyncrasy, but after certain inexorable laws that for the most part are left out of the dreamer's calculations altogether. Elisabeth, for example, to descend from the general to the particular, who had the habit of arranging events beforehand with a *mise en scène* and a dramatic sequence that insured her figuring to a more or less heroic strain, was too apt in these inspired moments to forget what, in more sober hours, pressed upon her heavily enough; that so far, at any rate, she, a shy and speechless girl (though conscious of several remarkable qualities, if other people could only have been brought to divine them), cut no very heroic figure in life—might cross the stage, indeed, twenty times, and yet raise no great thrill in the spectator. It might, I repeat, be a question difficult to decide whether this trick of imagination, always a strong factor in the young girl's life, brought her finally to more pleasure or distress. It was an imagination that made no very large exactions on life; it considered no splendid possibilities; nay, much that is offered and accepted as mere daily fare in some lives, presented itself to Elisabeth as the far-off unattainable nectar of the gods. More than one illusion, indeed, had been deadened in her already; from such experience as she had had, she had learned not greatly to expect. But expectation is one thing, imagination altogether another; and so much, besides, still lay outside the range of Elisabeth's experience! Given a hitherto untried event to look forward to, and our heroine was as ready to construct and

to decorate as if she had never been deceived or undeceived in all the seventeen years of her life.

This brief digression may help to explain how, in the week or so following the arrival of Mr. Holland's letter, that vexed question of the hundred-mark note began to fade out of Elisabeth's mind, while Mr. Holland's expected arrival took on itself daily a more and more glowing importance. The question, indeed, returned to her again and again with some force for a day or two ; it obtruded itself in the midst of a lecture ; it crossed the pages of more than one book. But, after all, she saw no means whatever of getting the money—her imagination drew a perfect blank in that direction—the matter must be left to chance. Perhaps some miraculous interposition might yet take place ; and at the worst—at the worst, Mr. Holland was so good, he would surely not mind waiting a little longer ; she would explain how it had all happened ; he would certainly understand. This happy conviction was the drowsy poppy pillow on which Elisabeth finally lulled her mind to rest. The question, I say, slipped from its first urgency ; its place became occupied by dreams of her approaching meeting with Mr. Holland. The occasion seemed extraordinarily momentous to Elisabeth. Ever since she had seen him on board the Rhine boat, the clergyman had occupied a large part of her thoughts, though in the content of her first weeks at the Pension Werner he had fallen a little into the background. But now something better than content lay before her—the agitation, the unrest that beset every vivid interest roused in man toward fellow-man. Elisabeth was young enough to count such unrest the highest joy in life ; and in her heart was the conviction that something of it lay in Mr. Holland's thought of her. She was certain he would think a great deal of meeting her again. And he was the brother of Madame von Waldorf.

This simple coincidence had filled Elisabeth with wonder. What a strange world in which such things could happen ! And with an opportuneness not less strange than the coincidence ; since in Madame von Waldorf's house she would certainly have occasions for meeting Mr. Holland that could hardly otherwise occur. Where that meeting would first take place occupied her mind extremely ; it offered the largest field to her imagination, the largest margin to uncertainties ; not a house or a street in Schlossberg but she might set up as a background if

she pleased. She did not even know what roof in Schlossberg would have the honor of sheltering him. Any roof, Elisabeth thought, would be honored by such sheltering office ; she herself was not far from longing to build him a little prophet's chamber, in which to minister to his daily needs. It was a point on which Mr. Sparrow might, perhaps, have enlightened her, since it was he, apparently, who was responsible for the housing of his friend ; but Elisabeth did not like Mr. Sparrow well enough to question him. She did not, indeed, care to question anyone on the subject, and might have gone on in ignorance until the very day of Mr. Holland's arrival, but for a chance remark from Mary Sparrow, who appeared as before in Elisabeth's room one evening before tea, with a fresh little pile of books.

"Oh, Elisabeth, did you know," she said, "Mrs. General Cleaver is going away to-morrow?"

"Is she?" said Elisabeth, not greatly interested.

"Yes," said Miss Sparrow ; "she told Frau Werner she could not stand papa and mamma any longer. Fancy, Elisabeth, her saying such a thing of papa and mamma! But mamma told papa she was very pleased, for it showed how much impression she had made by what she had said. Mamma says it takes so much to make any impression on a person like Mrs. Cleaver. So now, as she is going, Mr. Holland can have her room, and so, papa says, we shall be quite sure not to have the same sort of person again."

"Mr. Holland!" said Elisabeth.

"Yes, papa's friend, you know—the Vicar of Thornton Briars. Mamma did not very much care for him to come ; she told papa she doesn't believe he preaches pure Gospel truth. But papa said that didn't matter, as he would not be preaching sermons here, and he wouldn't need to lend him his pulpit more than once ; and it wouldn't be a bad thing, papa said, for the house to have two clergymen in it. Of course, mamma told papa she wouldn't have him interfere in any way, as we are the chaplain ; so I dare say it won't signify. Mamma has sent you some more of these little books, Elisabeth. She told papa she very much feared you had not read the last ; but she meant to persevere, as you interested her a good deal. Papa said he hadn't noticed you much."

"Oh," said Elisabeth, impatiently, "I wish you wouldn't repeat everything your papa and mamma say, Mary ; it is so silly of you. When is Mr. Holland coming?"

"I don't know," said Mary, in a huff; "and I'm sure I am not more silly than you are, Elisabeth. Mamma says nothing is so foolish as to think more of our bodies than of our souls, and I am sure you think a great deal of yours when you put on that fine white dress."

With this parting remark Miss Sparrow, having been stirred for once to utter an opinion of her own, left the room—an opinion, too, so strictly in accordance with the truth, that Elisabeth could not but feel a little wounded. But the sensation passed instantly in the immense, the agitating impression created by Mary Sparrow's intelligence. The tea-bell rang, but Elisabeth paid no heed; she stood careless of the reproof she would presently receive from Mrs. Sparrow; she was absorbed, she was almost awe-struck, by her contemplation of the immediate future. She had never expected Mr. Holland to come here—not here. The house was full, she had known, for the winter months; it had never occurred to her even to hope for such a thing. A felicity so profound went beyond her utmost imagination; it almost frightened her; she felt unworthy of it.

She went down to tea at last, and listened to Mrs. Sparrow's exhortations in a dream. She did not ask again when Mr. Holland was coming; but in no case, as she was aware, could that epoch-making meeting now be long delayed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MOMENTOUS MEETING.

The meeting took place dully enough, to Elisabeth's apprehension, only two days later. She was slowly descending the stairs for the mid-day meal, reading (it was a habit she had) as she went, when she nearly ran up against the two clergymen, Mr. Sparrow and Mr. Holland, as they issued from a door at the head of the stairs on the second landing. Elisabeth, who had not heard of Mr. Holland's arrival, stopped short, coloring with emotion. She half held out her hand; then hastily drew it back, perceiving, to her extreme mortification, that he did not recognize her in the least. He had, in fact, only seen her with her little brown hat pulled over her eyes; and unaware of her presence at the Pension Werner—he supposed her always

to be at the Pension Elder—he altogether failed to identify the young girl before him with that other young girl he had met on board the Rhine boat. He glanced at her kindly, however, as was his fashion with young people—she remembered that kindly glance—and the two men went down-stairs together. Elisabeth could only follow with a heart like lead. Here was a sorry end indeed to all her rapturous visions : Mr. Holland was come, and he did not even remember her ; she had not, apparently she had not, made even so much impression on him as that.

It was no better during dinner. Mr. Holland sat removed from her range of vision on the other side of Mrs. Sparrow. This was that worthy woman's own arrangement ; her husband, she considered, ought to continue to reign supreme on his own side of the table, and she wished herself to exercise a salutary influence on Mr. Holland. Her husband's friendship with him, dating from the first years of Mr. Holland's curacy in the North, had never altogether pleased her. She had felt doubtful about him then ; she had heard rumors since of proceedings in his own parish that justified these doubts to the utmost ; she burned to give him her opinion upon them. Her only chance, she had known, was to attach him to herself during meals. Mr. Sparrow admired, or at least tolerated, his wife in her public capacity ; in private life he permitted her to talk to him by the hour if she chose, though he seldom vouchsafed a more sympathetic reply than "Pooh, pooh, my dear," as he read and scored his pamphlets ; were any of his own friends present, however, Mrs. Sparrow, instructed by some experiences in the past, maintained a discreet and dignified silence. Elisabeth thus found herself divided and screened by the entire breadth of her good friend's portly person from the Vicar of Thornton Briars. He might as well not have been there at all, she thought in bitterness, as she escaped before the close of the meal, as was her custom on certain days, to join her afternoon classes. Burning tears of disappointment forced themselves to Elisabeth's eyes as she hurried along to the lecture-room ; but they were checked by a fresh hope. At supper-time they must certainly meet again ; but at supper he did not appear. Then Elisabeth's heart sank indeed. Could he have gone away? It was simply, as she subsequently discovered, that considerations of health had led him to arrange his meals at hours some-

what different from those followed in the pension; he never came down to supper. But Elisabeth's heart sank again like a stone. A vista of empty days stretched before her. The poor child had hung them so richly in anticipation, that the finest tapestries of life would have seemed somewhat meagre by comparison; and fate, it appeared to her, was about to furnish no tapestries at all—nothing but the dreariest whitewashed blank. The ascetic evening meal became to her bitter as a hermit's roots.

Much as she disliked the salon, a forlorn hope led her thither, almost before supper was ended. It stood empty, awaiting the influx of guests from the dining-room. Elisabeth, who had provided herself with a book, sat down in a corner, as far as possible from the central table, where Mrs. Sparrow had the habit of establishing herself with Mary. The blouses were finished; but there was always other work on hand; and Elisabeth did not want to be caught this evening, and made to listen to reading she did not care about. She sat with her eyes fixed on her book; and presently the story—Elisabeth loved few things better than a story—began to hold her attention, and transport her miles from Schlossberg. She was half involved in its intricacies, half conscious of what was going on round her, when, happening to look up as she turned a leaf, she saw Mr. Holland standing at the centre table, talking to Mrs. Sparrow. He glanced toward Elisabeth, looked at her for a moment, then addressed himself to Mrs. Sparrow once more. Elisabeth's heart began to beat; she forgot her story; the book closed on her hand. Had he recognized her at last? The next moment the question was answered; he crossed the room with his slow, shuffling invalid step, and standing before her, held out his hand.

"You must forgive me," he said, in the friendly voice of which Elisabeth remembered every intonation, "for not recognizing you before, but I didn't know you were here. I fancied you were at the Pension Elder."

Elisabeth stammered out her oft-repeated story of Miss Elder's death.

"Yes, yes," said the clergyman, letting himself slowly sink into an arm-chair at her side; "Mrs. Sparrow has been telling me about it. By the by, I have to thank you, my dear young lady, for the trouble you kindly took in forwarding my note to Mr. Sparrow."

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, awkwardly, "it was no trouble at all. We were all at supper; I only gave it to him."

"Still, I am much obliged to you." He let his eyes wander rather vaguely round the room. "And how do you like being here?" he said. "Comfortable, eh? It seems a nice enough sort of place—prices moderate, and so on."

"Oh, I like it very much," said Elisabeth, with enthusiasm; "I was never so happy in my life."

"Why, that is excellent," said the clergyman, smiling at her. "You are not disappointed with your life abroad, then? You were very pleased to come, I think you told me."

"Oh, no," said Elisabeth, "I'm not disappointed. And I don't think I should have liked the Pension Elder so much as this." A pause; Elisabeth twisted her fingers. "I hope—I hope you are better," she said then, timidly. "I hope the waters did you good."

"Well, we must hope so—we must hope so," said Mr. Holland. "It takes time, they say, for the good effects to make themselves felt. One must have patience, I suppose. Patience, patience," he repeated, smoothing down his grizzled beard; "that, after all, is the first and last thing in life. You see, I didn't enjoy coming abroad quite so much as you did," he added, smiling at Elisabeth.

"Oh! didn't you?" she answered, leaning forward a little in extreme interest.

"Well, no, I didn't. It's a hard thing—a hard thing, my dear, to break down in the midst of one's life's work, and have to give up everything at once. That is what happened to me. Why, I was as strong a man, I believe, as could have been found in my parish; there was nothing I couldn't do in the way of walking and riding; and one day I broke down quite suddenly without warning, and had to throw up everything. It is very hard to have to leave all one's occupations and interests—and to leave them in other hands, too," he concluded.

"It's dreadful—oh, I am very sorry!" said Elisabeth, with dilating eyes. "I do hope you will soon get well again."

"Well, well, one must have patience; and all these matters are in God's hands, you know," said the clergyman. His eyes wandered round the room again. "Who is that young lady in blue over there?" he inquired. "She is rather pretty."

The question was something of a shock to Elisabeth. Her feelings had been wound up to the highest point by

Mr. Holland's confidences; but the young lady in blue fell upon her exaltation with the effect of a cold-water douche. "I—I don't know," she said. "I think she has come in for the evening only; she's not staying in the house."

"Ah—well, there seem to be some pleasant people here," said Mr. Holland. "I fancy, after all, one may pass a few months here agreeably enough." He placed his hands on the arms of his chair, preparatory to rising. "By the by," he said to Elisabeth, "you haven't told me how you made out the rest of your journey after we parted. No more misadventures, eh?"

Elisabeth crimsoned. This was the moment she had dreaded; now she would have to tell Mr. Holland she had not got his money yet. Of course, he was expecting her to take her purse out of her pocket and pay him on the spot. What would he think of her if she did not? In the meantime, whatever he might think of her, she must answer his question.

"No, thank you, I had no more misadventures. I got here quite safely," she said; "only Miss Elder having died put me out a little. I had to go to an hotel."

"Ah, you had to go to an hotel?" he said, rather absently; Mr. Sparrow was approaching them from the other end of the room.

"Yes," said Elisabeth. "That is how I came to spend all the money you lent me," she would have liked to add, but a sudden sense of shame overcame her. All at once, put in that way, it seemed a dreadful thing to have done. "But Baroness von Leuwine was very kind to me," she went on, precipitately, "and Madame von Waldorf."

"Madame von Waldorf, eh? My half-sister, do you mean?" said Mr. Holland.

"Yes," said Elisabeth, shyly. "I know now she is your sister; I didn't know then."

"Well, we hardly know one another," said Mr. Holland; "we have not met for years. Good-night, my dear, I must go now; but you and I must have a little talk together, and settle our affairs, eh? Not a very long business, fortunately."

He went off with the English chaplain, and Elisabeth felt reprieved. But what, after all, is a reprieve? If not to-day, to-morrow, next day; there hangs the axe, there hovers the blow ready to fall. What would Mr. Holland think of her? Elisabeth had said to herself beforehand he was so kind, that it would not matter about the money;

but now, though she thought him kinder than ever, though she was palpitating with the honor conferred on her by his conversation and his confidence, she somehow felt it did matter. She had the most intense desire for his approbation ; nothing, she had all at once discovered, mattered to her quite so much as that. And yet, what would he think when he knew? That was her last thought at night ; it claimed her very first waking moments in the morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW ONE ACTS AT SEVENTEEN.

It is to be presumed that Elisabeth's doubt as to what Mr. Holland might think of her grew with the succeeding days ; otherwise she might probably have seized an earlier opportunity to ascertain his opinion than she actually did. On the other hand, an interview was easily evaded. She had only to shun the salon ; there was little chance of her encountering Mr. Holland elsewhere ; and occupied as she was all day, and often through the evening, with her studies, to shun the salon was not difficult. For four days she pursued this course. Some hope still remained in her mind that the improbable might happen to solve her difficulty ; and when a letter was handed to her from home, it would not have surprised her in the least to find that her uncle, à propos to nothing, had forwarded her a ten-pound note with his blessing. The letter, as a fact, contained nothing but one of her aunt's meagre and admonitory epistles. It was, perhaps, the disappointment consequent on this that made her realize all at once that the situation was unbearable—that she could not bear it a day longer. She must tell Mr. Holland that she could not pay him back his money yet, let him think of her what he would. It was late at night that Elisabeth came to this decision, sitting with her elbows on the table, in the midst of her books and papers, and her lamp-wick sinking in its socket. The house had long since been quiet ; every clock in the city was clanging from its high tower the half-hour after midnight, when the girl resolved that she would make her confession to Mr. Holland the very next day. Elisabeth, in too many directions, was a sad little coward enough ; but if she had the cowardice of a diffident and sensitive

nature that dreads blame as one might dread physical pain, she had also the courage proper to a loyal and truthful one. She was capable of making a resolution and keeping to it; she would not, perhaps, have been absolutely incapable of walking to the stake in support of the right when once she had made up her mind what the right was.

Having determined, then, to seek her opportunity, the opportunity was not far to find. She was aware—it was singular how, while diligently shunning Mr. Holland, she had gained no small intimacy with his habits—that the clergyman was to be found every day in the salon between five and six, reading the newspaper before his early supper. The salon was generally empty at that hour, and Elisabeth, who returned about that time from her classes, had occasionally taken advantage of the fact to examine at her leisure the collection of books stored in the glass bookcase for the benefit of Frau Werner's guests. To-day, as she slipped by the salon windows, which looked upon the street, she glanced in. A single lamp stood lighted on one of the small tables; the curtains were still undrawn, the room not yet fully illuminated. It was as she had expected—Mr. Holland was there alone. Elisabeth, with a beating heart, ran up the steps to the hall-door, opened and closed it, deposited her books on a table in the entry, and with the calm of desperation passed into the salon. The poor child had exaggerated the situation to a degree that would have rendered her incapable of speech had she reflected one moment now on what she was going to say. As it was, she had set aside reflection; she only knew what she meant to do.

"Mr. Holland," she began, going straight up to him.

He turned his head to see who was speaking.

"Ah! it is you, is it?" he said, in his friendly tones. "I had been wondering what had become of you all these days. We were to have a little conversation together, were we not?"

"Mr. Holland," said Elisabeth, somewhat reassured (Mr. Holland *was* kind—she had known he would be), "I am so sorry, but I haven't got the money yet to pay you back. I shall soon, I hope," she concluded, rather tamely.

Mr. Holland did not immediately answer. "Why, how is that?" he said then. "You cannot have spent the whole of a hundred marks between Bingen and Schlossberg?"

"No," said Elisabeth, dismayed by some change in his voice; "but I had to go to the hotel for a fortnight, and I had no money to pay the bill; and I thought, as you had lent it to me——" She came to a dead stop.

Mr. Holland turned over a page of the newspaper before answering. He felt the most lively annoyance. The money was gone, evidently; he should never see it again. It was not that he was in immediate need of it; and he had, as we know, secured himself against loss by borrowing it from his half-brother Otto. But he wanted to repay Otto, he told himself; and as it was Elisabeth, not he, who really owed the money, until she paid him he would have to bear the disagreeable sensation of being out of pocket. This singular logic quickened his natural irritation.

"You took the money, you mean, to pay your hotel bill?" he said at last, without raising his eyes from the newspaper. "Well, that wasn't very honest, was it?"

Elisabeth stood speechless.

"I don't call it very honest," he continued, glancing round at her for a moment, "to use money for your own purposes that you see no prospect of repaying. What do you think about it yourself?"

"Oh!" said Elisabeth; and turning, fled from the room.

She fled from the room, up the long flights of stairs to her own apartment, and entering, locked the door behind her. It was the hour she loved best—dark within, red sunset-glow without; but she had no thought of that now. She dropped into a chair, and sat and shivered. A strange and sickening feeling had come over her, such as she had only known before in some horrible dream. That, then, was what Mr. Holland thought of her. Elisabeth shivered again; she did not cry; she was chilled to the heart.

She sat a long time, not knowing what to do; but at last she got up, struck a match, lighted her little lamp, and sitting down on the sofa in front of her table, began pulling her papers about; but she laid them down again directly, and sat with her head sunk between her hands. She did not know what to do; nothing so dreadful had ever happened to her before; she could not see an inch before her. Presently it would be supper time, but she couldn't go down-stairs; she couldn't run the risk of meeting Mr. Holland; she could never meet him again, unless she had the money to repay him; that was certain. Of course she could not repay him; she could no more do it

now than she could an hour ago ; but it had not seemed so dreadfully wicked then. "I don't call that honest ; what do you think about it yourself ?"—she kept hearing the words over and over again, and each time with that horrible sickening feeling that made her shudder away, as it were, from herself. Elisabeth took up a pen, and dipping it in the ink, copied out the first sentence of a roughly-written theme that lay on the table ; then she dropped the pen and sat staring straight before her at the shadows on the long sloping wall of her room. What was she to do ? She did not know what to do.

A thought occurred to her. Could she not run away and hide herself in some place as a governess, as a nursery governess, as an English nursemaid even, till she had earned back the money, and could pay it ? Elisabeth paused on this idea, which commended itself to her imagination ; she had read in story-books of such things being done ; and an escape from difficulty by a flight into freedom seemed of all escapes the most commendable. But again she was confronted by the initial difficulty—she had no money ; two or three stray English coins of small value represented her entire fortune until Christmas. No, there was no escape in that direction. Elisabeth jumped up, and began to pace up and down the room. Oh, it was horrible, horrible ; she had never known anything like it before. What was she to do ? What was she to do ?

An immense inspiration all at once illuminated the girl's tormented mind. Her turquoise necklace—why had she not thought of it before ? It was worth a good deal of money, she knew ; why should she not sell that, and repay Mr. Holland at once ? Certainly she could sell it, she even felt sure she knew where ; at a certain antiquary's, whose shop she passed daily on her way to and from her classes, and at whose window she often paused to contemplate the antique gems and curios hung up for display. Some of them were marked at more than a hundred marks ; she might get, Elisabeth thought that she certainly ought to have no difficulty in getting, that sum for her turquoises. She looked at a little Black Forest clock that ticked against the wall ; it was still early, she would have time to go and return before supper. This very evening she might get the money and pay it back to Mr. Holland ; he would not think her dishonest then. Elisabeth did not spend one minute in reflection. With hands trembling with eagerness, she pulled out her drawer and thrust the case con-

taining the necklace into her pocket; and hurrying on her hat and jacket again, she ran quickly down-stairs, and was out in the street and on her way to the antiquary's shop before she had well realized what she was about. She might have been a trifle frightened otherwise, for it was almost dark, and she had never been out so late by herself before; she had no business to be out now, as she very well knew. But the consciousness only sent her hurrying more swiftly along the ill-paved streets. Not twenty voices calling her could have held her back now; nor, in fact, was the expedition in itself a very formidable one. In barely twenty minutes Elisabeth was in her room again, her necklace gone, her hundred marks in her pocket. The antiquary—she had hardly dared to hope it—had made no difficulties at all. For one thing, she was English; and that, though she did not know it, had smoothed her way; and then she had made no attempt to drive a bargain. She wanted a hundred marks, neither more nor less; and at the first suggestion of less, had taken up her necklace in despair to leave the shop—a single-minded purpose that had stood her need in better stead than the wiliest turn for business. There were the hundred marks, at any rate; and that troublesome passage in her life brought promptly to a close.

Not quite to a close, however, since the money had still to be given to Mr. Holland. Elisabeth wanted him to have it that very evening, she could not rest until it was safely in his hands. The question was how to get it there. She could not go to his room; she could not—not after that stormy passage—give it to him before all the people in the salon. She might enclose it in a note and send it to him by the maid; yes, that would perhaps be the best way. Elisabeth took a sheet of paper, and sat down to write; but was instantly arrested by a doubt as to how she ought to begin. She had never written to a clergyman before; she had not an idea how to begin. Some ceremony of title, she believed, had to be observed; and it was of such vital moment—it seemed so to Elisabeth—that she should make no mistake that might offend Mr. Holland, and make him think worse of her than before. And this weighty dilemma, which kept her pen suspended some ten minutes over her paper, may fitly give the measure of Elisabeth's knowledge of life and of the relative importance of its affairs.

The supper-bell rang while she was still deliberating.

She tore up the sheet of paper on which she had scribbled one or two futile beginnings, thrust the money into her pocket, and ran down-stairs. As she traversed the hall on her way to the dining-room, a new idea occurred to her. Frau Werner's little room usually stood empty in the evening, that good woman preferring, after she had seen her children safely into bed, to seek cheerfulness with her guests in the salon, rather than endure the solitude of her own apartment. More than once, having taken a fancy to the girl, she had offered the use of it to Elisabeth ; if she wanted to study, the kind soul said, it was more cheerful for her to sit there than in her bedroom at the top of the house. Elisabeth liked her own room best ; but, too grateful to refuse a kindness, she had occasionally accepted the offer. Now, she thought, she would ask Frau Werner to let her take her books there to-night ; the door opened near the foot of the staircase ; she could watch for Mr. Holland, and give him the money on his way from the salon to his own room. Then she would be at peace.

Elisabeth's chief concern, when her purpose was so far accomplished that she found herself seated with her books in Frau Werner's parlor, was that Mr. Holland should not leave the salon, as he sometimes did, in company with Mr. Sparrow. Fate was propitious to her ; Mr. Holland, as it happened, left the salon early and alone. It was a little past nine o'clock when Elisabeth heard his slow, uncertain step coming along the hall. She started up, threw wide the already half-open door, and stood on the threshold.

"Mr. Holland," she said, in trembling tones.

The clergyman turned. He also had been feeling a little remorseful since his interview with Elisabeth ; in the annoyance of the moment he had spoken more harshly than he could have wished. Mr. Holland had an overbearing and an obstinate strain in his character that accounted for much of his ascendancy over his flock. He was never afraid to reprove ; and to many people there is a very well-defined enjoyment in the reception of hard, downright knocks from a nature they feel to be stronger than their own. The personal interest implied, the sense of a master, compensate for a little roughness of treatment. But Mr. Holland had a kindly as well as a domineering strain in his character ; his ascendancy would have been less assured but for that. He was genuinely vexed with himself now for having lost his temper with Elisabeth. A

little reflection had instructed him that, after all, he incurred no great risk of loss, since the girl was provided with relations to whom application in the last resort could be made. He had looked for her in the salon after supper to make it up, as the children say, with a few kind words. He came at once now, at the sound of her voice.

"Mr. Holland," said Elisabeth, "this is your money, please." She was incapable of saying more.

"How? I don't understand, my dear," said the clergyman, taking the note she thrust into his hand. ".Come in out of the draught," he said, for they were standing in the open doorway. He drew her into the room, and closed the door behind them. "Now," he said, "I don't quite understand. I thought you told me that you hadn't got the money."

"I know," said Elisabeth, hurriedly; "but I've got it since. I wanted you to have it."

"Well, that was quite right of you, my dear; but there was no such immediate hurry," said the clergyman. "I could have waited a little while, my dear young lady; or I could have written to your aunt." Elisabeth's eyes widened with horror; this was a contingency that had never occurred to her. "Now," Mr. Holland went on, "I am afraid you may have put yourself to some inconvenience. You've not got yourself into any trouble about it, eh?"

"No, no, no!" cried Elisabeth. "Oh, I wanted you to have it. I couldn't bear you should think me—think me dishonest."

"Why, nonsense, my dear, nonsense!" said the clergyman, laying a hand kindly on the girl's shoulder. "Who ever dreamed of your being dishonest? A little careless and thoughtless, perhaps, but you'll improve."

"Oh, yes," said Elisabeth; "I'll try to improve." She dropped into the chair from which she had risen and burst into a passion of tears. Mr. Holland stood by, feeling slightly uncomfortable. He had made more than one young parishioner weep before now; but Elisabeth was not his parishioner, and this was not his vicarage parlor. There might be a certain awkwardness should anyone come into Frau Werner's sitting-room and find Miss Verrinder seated there in floods of tears.

"Come, come," he said at last, in his kind, persuasive tones, "command yourself, my dear young lady. You are troubling yourself too much about a matter that in any

case was of little moment, and that is altogether done with now. Believe me, I, for one, shall never think of it again."

He held out his hand as he spoke with a friendly smile. Elisabeth looked up with streaming eyes ; then, pressing her handkerchief to her face, clung for a moment to the hand held out to her, and fled from the room up-stairs. Mr. Holland made a movement to follow her ; but she had already disappeared round the first turn of the staircase. He stood considering for a moment ; then going back into the little parlor, examined the hundred-mark note he still held in his hand by the light of Frau Werner's lamp, and placed it with an air of deliberation and reflection in his pocketbook. Afterward, instead of pursuing his way to his room, he returned with slow footsteps to the salon.

That room presented its usual evening appearance ; the tapestries, the whist, the subdued giggling, all going on ; Mr. Sparrow stretched out at full length in an armchair in the middle of the room, yawning immensely, obtrusively, from time to time ; Mary Sparrow seated with her mother at the centre table, her attention nervously divided between her work and her scissors, which the divinity student at her side was vacantly engaged in spoiling by stretching them open to their utmost width, then closing them again with a snap. Mary would not for the world have interfered with this guileless pastime, which promised to keep the young man beside her all the evening ; but it did distress her orderly mind to have her scissors spoiled. Mrs. Sparrow, with her usual air of dignified superiority, was audibly haranguing a small lady, a distant cousin of her own, who had joined Frau Werner's establishment within the last few days. Miss Robbins had for some years been matron in a boys' school, and had filled that onerous office with much distinction. Circumstances, however, that do not in the least concern this little history, having offered her a small independence, she had retired, amid the cheers of the boys, first to her native Somersetshire village, and subsequently to seek adventure on the great European continent. She was a dressy little person, and the lavender-colored barege, figured in black, that she wore, was one of several well-preserved garments that had been shaking out their creases and their splendors since her arrival at the Pension Werner. A black lace cap, adorned with a lavender bow

and some metallic green ears of corn artfully bristling among the ribbons, crowned her thin bands of sandy hair. A guileless little woman, she had already confided to Mrs. Sparrow that she had never seen anything so chaste and beautiful as that lady's *parure* in seed-pearls. Mrs. Sparrow, justly gratified by this candid appreciation, had at once taken her cousin under her protection, and was now instructing her ignorance in the more subtle ways and snares of foreign life.

"Frau Werner, now," she said in a commanding voice, which might easily have carried her words to that good-natured woman on the other side of the room, "Frau Werner is an excellent person—excellent; I should be sorry to say a word against her. Our rooms are not everything I could have desired, but we are people of simple habits; her terms are moderate, I am informed, her table varied and liberal; and yet she is a foreigner, my dear, she is a foreigner; she has never yet assimilated, as I might say, the best tastes of the best classes of English society. Take the little library, for instance, she provides for our entertainment. The first task Mr. Sparrow and I had to undertake on our arrival here was to weed out (we have had the same sort of thing to do before) and remove the pernicious literature it contained—enticing, no doubt, but all the more pernicious for that, and, alas! the most diligently read. And yet there must have been some sincere Christians coming and going, who might have instructed Frau Werner, had she been willing to learn, in the finer shades of our English home-life."

"Very, very sad," murmured Miss Robbins, a good deal preoccupied. "And yet," she went on, brightening up wonderfully, "there is something very attractive in an establishment of this kind; so much going on, so many young people, so many pretty new fashions. I am getting quite a stock of new ideas for our little dressmaker at home; she is a great friend of mine, you know, and I promised to keep my eyes open both for dresses and millinery. I think I must write to her to-morrow."

It was at this moment that Mr. Holland re-entered the room. He came up to the table, drew an armchair forward, and, taking a newspaper from his pocket, began to read; in a minute, however, he laid it across his knee, and sat gazing absently before him. Mrs. Sparrow, a trifle disconcerted by her cousin's frivolous and democratic tastes, had lapsed into momentary silence; Miss

Robbins was engaged in absorbing new ideas for her friend. It was Mr. Holland who spoke first.

"What sort of young girl," he said, "is Miss Verrinder? She is under your care here, I think, Mrs. Sparrow."

"Not so much as I could wish," answered that lady, promptly; "not nearly so much as I could wish, Mr. Holland. She is sadly in need of thorough Christian training, poor child; but though Baroness von Leuwine requested me to allow her to sit next to me at table, I have, I regret to say, no real authority over her whatever. I do see that she changes her wet shoes and stockings when she comes in out of the rain—I never knew a young girl more heedless in such matters than Elisabeth—but I really don't know another fault I have been able to correct in her."

"She is more punctual at meals, mamma," put in Mary, good-naturedly.

"Perhaps—yes, in that respect I do see a slight improvement; but there are other and more important matters in which she is very sadly wanting; and I fear—I very much fear—there are worldly influences at work quite averse to any I might bring to bear."

"Oh, indeed! Miss Verrinder is a very worldly young person, then," said Mr. Holland, smiling a little, and taking up his newspaper again. Mr. Holland, it may be observed in passing, held Mrs. Sparrow and her opinions in no very great esteem. He had not come to Schlossberg to be admonished by the chaplain's wife, and he had already found occasion to change his place at the table, under pretext of a draught—a pretext that Mrs. Sparrow had seen through at a glance, and which might have roused her deepest indignation but for the interpretation she was able to put upon it. "I rejoice, James," she said to her husband, "to perceive the impression I have already made on Mr. Holland. I can see he is afraid of my arguments; he had not a word to say in reply, and he has moved his seat in consequence."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear, nonsense!" said Mr. Sparrow. "You're not in the least likely to have made any impression on Holland. I never knew a man with a clearer notion of what his opinions are, or who sticks to them closer than he does. He's as obstinate as a limpet, and I respect him for it. He's sick of hearing you discuss the subject, that's all; and I don't at all wonder at it."

This brutal frankness, however (to which, indeed, she was well accustomed), in no way disturbed Mrs. Sparrow's

complacency; she simply continued to look on Mr. Holland with an eye of increased benevolence, as a possible brand to be rescued. Elisabeth, as another brand, had also a share in this wide-embracing benevolence; Mrs. Sparrow would have found her much less interesting had she been as strictly orthodox and right-thinking as her daughter Mary.

"Very, very worldly," she said now, in answer to Mr. Holland's remark, "and much too independent. Once, at least, she has been to the opera; and twice spent her Sunday evenings abroad without ever consulting me or Mr. Sparrow, who for the present, at any rate, is her spiritual pastor."

"Oh, well, there's no very great harm in an opera occasionally," said Mr. Holland, "though I should not recommend too much amusement of the kind for young people. It is apt to run into dissipation; that is where the danger lies. But how does Miss Verrinder come to be so independent? She has some relations—an uncle or aunt, I believe."

"I know nothing about her relations," said Mrs. Sparrow; "her aunt writes to the Baroness and Frau Werner, but she has not thought fit to communicate with me. Had she done so, I should have written to her at length, and begged her to place Elisabeth more completely under my authority. Being ignored, I can do nothing."

"Nonsense, my dear," said her husband, joining with some suddenness in the conversation; "I should have allowed you to do nothing of the kind. What is Miss Verrinder to us, that you should accept any responsibility in the matter? If it were a guardianship, now, with an allowance, it would be another thing altogether; eh, Holland? But the Baroness has simply thrust the young lady upon us, and I doubt if we shall get as much as a civil thank you for our pains. Now, considering that Miss Verrinder will have three hundred a year of her own when she comes of age——"

"Dear me, James, who told you that?" said his wife. "I was not aware of it."

"The Baroness told me," he answered. "I've never discussed the subject with you, my dear; you accepted everything the Baroness von Leuwine said, without consulting me, and there was an end of the matter. But I was not going to have Miss Verrinder fastened on to us without knowing anything about her. Why, she might have

been borrowing money of us ; she might have been simply left on our hands ; eh, Holland ? Even as it is, I don't see it ; I don't see it at all."

Mr. Sparrow rose with the last words and left the room. His wife looked after him admiringly.

"That is so like your father, Mary," she said ; "to see him, Mr. Holland, one would imagine him entirely absorbed in his books and the weightier functions of his office. 'All these lighter matters I leave to you.' That is what he says to me frequently. And yet, you see, when it comes to the point, he is far more practical than I am. I never thought of inquiring about Elisabeth's worldly affairs ; it was her soul, poor child, that interested me. Poor child, indeed ! with a fortune lying in wait for her as a snare, and so little sense of responsibility."

"Ah, well, three hundred a year is no such great fortune," said Mr. Holland ; "no such great fortune. Still, better than nothing," he went on musingly, "far better than nothing." He sat silent a moment, then slowly folding his newspaper, replaced it in his pocket. "Miss Verrinder," he said, pausing as he prepared to rise, "is very independent, you say. But as regards money, now—as an heiress in a small way, I suppose she is pretty independent in that respect also."

"No, that I am sure she is not," interposed Mary Sparrow, "for I asked her the other day to give something toward a poor woman's clothes, and she said she would have no money at all till the new year."

Mr. Holland was silent a minute. He was not a little puzzled as to how Elisabeth had procured the hundred marks ; but after all, as he immediately reflected, it was not a point that concerned him. "Her relations are careful, no doubt," was all he said in answer, "and in that they are right. It is unwise to trust a young girl with too much money. Or perhaps she is careless in her expenditure." He rose from his chair. "She seems an amiable young girl," he said, addressing Mrs. Sparrow, "well-disposed, right-minded, a little heedless, perhaps, as is natural at her age, but not otherwise blameworthy. One must not expect too much of young people."

He smiled kindly at Mary Sparrow as he spoke, and slowly left the room. Miss Robbins looked after him.

"Well !" she said, I do think that for a clergyman Mr. Holland has very extravagant notions. Three hundred a year no great fortune for a young thing like Miss Verrinder !

I know I should be glad to have three hundred a year—very glad, indeed. And I must say, Jane, if you'll excuse my saying so, I didn't quite like the way in which your husband spoke of Miss Verrinder, as if she were in a conspiracy to rob you, or worse. I've never spoken to her, but I've seen her at meals; and I'm sure she's a very nice, pretty, quiet girl."

"My husband was perfectly right," Mrs. Sparrow answered, with dignity. "There is no question of robbing, of course; and if there were, it would not be the money James would think of. He is a most liberal man; I am sure the sums he gives to charities are what most people would think quite beyond our limited means. But James hates to be imposed upon; and in our position, standing at the head of the English society in whatever place we go to, it is incredible the multitude of applications that are made to us, each of which has to be considered on its own merits. I could tell you of more than one painful experience, my dear Arabella; of more than one most painful experience. Personally, I admit, I had no doubts about Elisabeth, since she was recommended to me by the Baroness; but one cannot be too careful; and it is the principle, the principle that we ought to hold to. I feel rebuked, I own, for my want of forethought. But all is well that ends well, and Elisabeth, you see, has three hundred a year! It is perhaps in this way, by not taking thought, that we entertain angels unawares."

And Elisabeth meanwhile, up-stairs in her own room, was crying her eyes out in a torrent of tears, the final result of all the agitations of the day. The room was dark; she had flung herself in the darkness face downward on her bed, and lay there sobbing out her heart. Tears were a relief; she wanted to cry. The great dread of grief that comes in later life, the terrible shrinking from the emotion that shakes and rends existence to its foundation, is happily unknown to the young, who have the compensations of inexperience as well as its terrors. But presently, as Elisabeth calmed down, her large and vague misery began to take a more definite form; it took the shape of her necklace. Elisabeth had loved her turquoise trinket; it had been given her by her mother, who had fastened it round the neck of the little five-year-old girl in the last days of her life. "She will remember my doing it," the poor mother had said, looking at the curly-headed child capering with glee before the mirror at the pretty blue

plaything leaping up and down on her white frock. "Let her keep it always." Elisabeth had remembered; she had always kept it; and no one of her possessions had been so precious to her. And now she would never see it again.

After a while, however, she began to think of the inscription on her necklace, whose meaning she had never understood until a few days back. Somehow, that comforted her a little; it was something for her imagination to cling to in her unhappiness. It seemed as though it must have been put there on purpose for her. Presently she was not far from thinking that it must certainly have been put there on purpose for her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DAY AFTER.

When Elisabeth next met Mr. Holland, he treated her with a particular kindness that filled the poor child's heart with joy. She had felt so terribly, so unaccountably guilty toward him, so much more guilty than she had ever felt toward anyone before, that this sense of special favor, this more than plenary absolution, could hardly have seemed to her more exquisite, had it descended straight from heaven on an archangel's wings. They met on the morning after their somewhat agitated interview. It happened to be a Thursday, the Schlossberg half-holiday, when Elisabeth's classes closed at mid-day; and she was descending the steps of the Pension Werner on her way to Madame von Waldorf's house, where she was to dine at one o'clock, and give the Baroness a sitting directly afterward. A sudden call of business was taking the Baroness to Vienna some weeks earlier than she had originally intended; she would be leaving Schlossberg in a few days, and she was anxious to finish Elisabeth's head, that she was modelling in clay, before she went. Elisabeth came down the steps wrapped in her brown cloak, her little brown hat pulled well over her eyes; for her eyes were reddened and swollen a little still with last night's crying, and her cheeks were pale. Mr. Holland had left the house but two minutes before her. Elisabeth had, in fact, seen him descending the stairs; and with a sudden tremor, retarded her own progress till she heard the house door

close behind him. He was crossing the road; but hearing in his turn the house door close as she came out into the street, turned his head. Seeing who it was, he at once retraced his steps.

"Well, how are you to-day?" he said, holding out his hand.

Elisabeth, reddening as usual, gave him her hand, but was incapable of speech. The clergyman, seeing her confusion, went on talking without waiting for an answer.

"A cold day," he said. "Well, well, here we are not far from November. We can't expect summer weather any longer now, and we may be thankful to have this bright sunshine instead of a fog, as we might have in England. And where are you off to, my dear? To your classes, as usual?"

"Not to-day. It's a half holiday. I am going to Madame von Leuwine's," said Elisabeth, recovering some measure of voice and composure. "I am going to dine there."

"Ah, Madame von Leuwine—at my sister's house, you mean," said Mr. Holland. He stood silent a moment, smoothing down his mustache and beard with his forefinger, a gesture habitual with him. "So we shall not see you at dinner to-day," he said then, smiling at her.

"No," said Elisabeth, coloring again at the kindness of his look and tone. "I am going to sit to the Baroness; she is doing my head in clay, you know."

"Ah, yes, she likes doing that sort of thing," said Mr. Holland, "and she is very clever at it; the Baroness is a very clever woman." He paused again, looking at Elisabeth. "Well," he said, "I mustn't detain you; I hope you'll have a very pleasant time. And don't worry yourself, my dear; there is no need for you, you know, to worry yourself."

He spoke with extreme kindness. Elisabeth looked up at him; the tears rushed to her eyes again, and she turned her head quickly away. Mr. Holland would think her too silly if she cried every time he spoke to her. He took no notice, however; but raising his soft clerical hat, recrossed the road and went on his way in one direction, while Elisabeth pursued hers in another. That was all that passed between them; but a sense of heaven, as I have said, filled her heart as she walked along. Mr. Holland did not think the worse of her, after all, for what had passed; he forgave her entirely. Elisabeth did not re-

pent then of having sold her turquoise necklace. A moment such as this was worth a hecatomb of necklaces.

She was destined, however, to hear more about her necklace before the day closed. Still fanned by those airs of Paradise, she arrived at Madame von Waldorf's house, and dined *tête-à-tête* with the Baroness, Emilia, with her little daughter, having gone to pay a few hours' visit in the country. Elisabeth always liked dining at Madame von Waldorf's. The lofty room, with windows opening on to the terrace, the small square dining-table set with the whitest of damask, the most shining of glass and silver, afforded a very enlivening contrast to the long, somewhat dingily appointed board round which Frau Werner's guests gathered three times a day. Elisabeth enjoyed it most when she found herself alone with the Baroness. With Madame von Waldorf she still, as has been said, felt shy and embarrassed; but with the Baroness she was almost at her ease. She was so much at her ease, in fact, that she permitted herself to continue the fit of abstraction into which her meeting with Mr. Holland had thrown her. The Baroness, in her easy-fitting drab merino gown, her broad benevolent face beaming above a worked cambric collar of a date some twenty years back, glanced at her young companion from time to time. Her pale cheeks, her reddened and swollen eyelids, did not escape the Baroness's notice. She took the girl's arm at the conclusion of the meal to lead her up to the studio, giving her at the same time a friendly tap on the shoulder.

"Do you know," she said, "if you were one of my girls I should give you a good shaking."

"Oh, why?" said Elisabeth, starting.

"Because you don't pay the smallest attention to what I am saying. Here have I been talking to you all through dinner, and not a word in reply have I been able to get."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Elisabeth, in confusion. "I thought I answered always."

"Yes, yes," said the Baroness; "'Yes' and 'No;' generally put in the wrong places. I declare," she continued good-humoredly, "I should like to shake all you young girls in a sack together, to put a little sense into your heads. It's a mercy that up to eighteen or so you are the most unimportant beings in creation, or the world would be in a bad way. But here are you not far from eighteen, my dear. You must mend your ways; you must mend

your ways." She turned Elisabeth's face to the light as they entered the studio. "What's the matter with you?" she said. "What have you been crying about?"

"Nothing—nothing, indeed," said Elisabeth, turning away her head. "I've not been crying; not to-day, that is; a little last night, but it's over now."

"Over, is it?" said the Baroness. "Nothing gone wrong at the pension? Nothing that is making you unhappy?"

"No, no," said Elisabeth, with eagerness. "I am very happy, really—very happy, indeed."

"So, so; that is well," said the Baroness, releasing her. Then taking her arm again: "Listen to me," she said. "If you're in any trouble, come to me. Do you understand? Or rather, since I am going away, write to me. Don't be afraid. Do you understand?"

"Yes, thank you," said Elisabeth, shyly. She was grateful to the Baroness, but deep in her heart lay the conviction that so long as Mr. Holland remained in Schlossberg she would need no other friend. Who could be so good and kind as he was? The Baroness regarded her with attention for a moment.

"Well, to business," she said then, enveloping herself in a huge linen apron; "we have no time to lose, though I hope to finish everything essential to-day. Don't touch your hair, my dear; it will do very well. Only your head a little more this way—so."

The Baroness, manipulating her clay, and studying Elisabeth's face, had occasion to note more than one change of expression in the course of the next hour. Elisabeth, having nothing to do but to remain perfectly still, began, as was her habit while sitting to the Baroness, to go over the notes of her lectures, so as to make sure of having them properly in her head. There was also an essay to be written treating of the sixteenth century in France; this was a fine opportunity for composing it. But Elisabeth's mind slipped in the promptest manner from the sixteenth century to this actual hour in the nineteenth century, which held such infinitely greater interest for her. She could not think of François Premier; she could think only of Mr. Holland. The Baroness, turning her eyes on her from minute to minute as she sat there motionless, her chin a little lifted, her gaze fixed on a patch of blue sky, saw a flush, as it were, a brightening dawn of emotion, pass over the girl's features; her eyes, still heavy from last night's tears, softened and lighted

up, her lips parted and trembled a little, her faint color deepened; the young face, on which experience had traced no lines as yet, was transfigured as a landscape is transfigured in the transcendant evening light, as one sees now and then a face transfigured under the influence of certain strains of music. Elisabeth, in fact, was listening to a music more divine to her apprehension than any earthly strain; she was lending ear to the mystic rapturous chant that a fresh young soul, disposed by nature for worship, raises before the shrine in which it has set its idol. The Baroness, meanwhile, worked on rapidly, effacing a line here, strengthening another there.

"That will do for the present," she said at last, "you can rest a little now."

Elisabeth looked round, half-dazed for the moment, her eyes dazzled by their fixed gaze on the blue light. Then she descended from the high seat on which she had been perched, and going up to the Baroness, put her hand into hers, and with a movement foreign to her usual shy diffidence, kissed her. The elder woman put her arm round the girl's waist and drew her toward her.

"The child is in love," she said to herself; "but with whom? Whom can she have seen? Merciful powers! not with Gordon, I trust; heaven forbid."

"Well," she said, addressing Elisabeth, "there you are, you see. How do you like yourself?"

"I like it very much," said Elisabeth; "I don't think it can be very like me, though."

"Not as you see yourself in the glass, I dare say," said the Baroness; "but like you, nevertheless. And now, if you will do me a favor, my dear child, you will go into the garden and pick me some chrysanthemums. I have not a flower left, as you see; and Madame von Waldorf is coming to take coffee with me on her return from the country. You can go while I write a note; and afterward we can work again for a little while."

The Baroness, as she spoke, moved to the further end of the room, and pouring some water into a china basin, set in a curtained recess, began to wash her hands. "Can it be Gordon?" she said to herself, still preoccupied with her idea. "Poor child! I don't believe he has ever looked at her; not that that would make much difference on her side. Well, I must find out if I can."

"I must make my room gay," she said, going back to Elisabeth, "since Madame von Waldorf is coming. She

will feel deserted soon. I go on Monday, and Mr. Temple will be leaving Schlossberg before long."

"Oh, will he?" said Elisabeth, not greatly interested, and engaged in tying the strings of her cloak. "Where is he going?"

"To the East—to Persia, I believe. He has a travelling appointment, and will be absent for some time. Madame von Waldorf will miss him."

"Oh, yes," said Elisabeth; "but it will be nice for him, won't it? Isn't he very fond of travelling? What sort of chrysanthemums would you like me to get for you? Do you like all kinds?"

"Yes, all kinds," said the Baroness, absently. "No, it is not Gordon," she decided. "Well, perhaps I was mistaken after all." She turned to her work and began to handle the clay again, forgetful of her note. "To-morrow, also," she said to Elisabeth, "you will have to find me an hour, my dear, between your classes, that I may finish what I have to do. There is more than I thought. And, by the by, Elisabeth, to-morrow I should like you to bring your necklace with you; I have an idea that I might introduce it with good effect, but I cannot be sure till I see it again."

"My necklace!" said Elisabeth.

"Yes, your turquoise necklace. Why, what is the matter?" cried the Baroness, suddenly noting the expression of Elisabeth's face. "You have not lost it, child, surely? It's not that you have been crying about?"

"No, no, I have not lost it," said Elisabeth, in extreme embarrassment; "but I don't know—I don't know whether I can bring it."

"Not lost it—can't bring it! But, in short, my dear child, what then have you done with it?" said the Baroness. "Have you given it away?"

"No," said Elisabeth; "I have—I'll bring it if I can; perhaps I can." A wild project flitted through her brain of begging the antiquary to let her have her necklace again for only one hour.

"Come, come," said the Baroness; "some mishap has occurred, I see—some piece of carelessness. You are a sadly careless child, Elisabeth, and you don't like to tell me. But tell me, by all means, my dear child; no doubt it can be remedied, whatever it is. Not now, though," she added, as a footstep sounded on the stair outside, "for I hear Gordon Temple coming. Go into the garden now

and get me my flowers. We can have our explanation afterward."

Elisabeth escaped but too gladly, brushing past Gordon, flying down the stairs as though a dozen detectives were at her heels, all demanding the vanished necklace at once. Out in the garden she forgot her errand for a moment in sheer terror and desperation as she strayed along the sunny walks. Here were all her bristling difficulties upon her once more, not a pin-point of an outlet, as it seemed, between their serried points, and a guilty conscience behind all. Once, as a little child of four or five, Elisabeth had sat up in her crib one morning to finish some scrap of needlework that had engaged her childish fancy, only presently to discover in an anguish of remorse that the day was Sunday, and that as she set her stitches she had irrevocably broken the Fourth Commandment ; and at seventeen she had still something of the moral sensitiveness and moral perception she had had at five. To herself it seemed that she had been commiting a series of heinous crimes in these last few days. The Baroness's questions had shattered entirely that fine serenity brought about by Mr. Holland's goodness. She would have to tell everything to the Baroness, and the Baroness would think her as wicked as Mr. Holland had done—more wicked, since already, without knowing the facts, she evidently thought it dreadful that there should be a difficulty about the necklace. It did not occur to Elisabeth to drown herself in the little round pond deserted by the goldfish in these last chilly days ; it would not have occurred to her had her need and despair been a hundred times greater than they were. But the thought of flight and freedom did cross her mind once more ; to run and hide herself away anywhere—anywhere that she might see no one she knew ever again. Her heart bounded for an instant at the thought, as it had done last night ; but it sank again immediately, as it had not done last night—as though someone had given it a dull pull back. And, in any case, she could not go away, she had no money ; she had thought all that out before. Elisabeth fell to pulling her nosegay in sheer despair, while her tears began to drop and drop till the red and brown autumn flowers looked as though visited by a sudden spring shower. In the meantime a conversation, not without results for her, was taking place up-stairs, where the Baroness was entertaining her visitor.

"Come in," she said to him, as he hesitated a moment

on the threshold; "no, you are not disturbing me. On the contrary, I have just sent Elisabeth into the garden for a few minutes' rest. Sit down; I can go on with what I am doing while you talk."

"I can't stay," he answered. "I only came, in fact, to say that I can't dine here this evening. I have some work that I must finish."

"Ah, that is tiresome of you—and of your work," said the Baroness, pinching her clay. "Well I am sorry, in short. Here I leave Schlossberg on Monday, and heaven knows when we may meet again. I am getting too old to look forward to meetings; I am getting too old not to grudge losing a pleasure. That is where we old people and the young ones meet. In middle life we are simply indifferent."

Her companion laughed. "You talk," he said, "as if you were in your decrepid hundredth year, instead of being the youngest person I know. Well I grudge losing a pleasure, too, though I am neither old nor young; and I mean to come in for an hour after dinner this evening. But I don't care to leave my father for long just now; there you have the truth."

"He is not unwell," said the Baroness, turning round quickly. "Emilia and I saw him yesterday."

"No, no," he said. He gave rather an awkward laugh, and set his hat on the ground. "I don't like looking forward to meetings, either," he said; "you see, we are alike in every particular."

"Oh, no doubt," said the Baroness, looking at him without much heeding her words. "You look tired," she said, a minute afterward; "what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I am not at all tired," he answered; "I'm rather bothered, that's all. I'm rather bothered," he went on, as the Baroness did not speak, "at not getting some money I had some reason to expect. It has rather put me out for the moment; it won't matter ultimately."

"But, my dear Gordon, are you not really wanting in—what shall I say?—common-sense, let me call it," said the Baroness, "that you should worry for one moment about money when Emilia and I——"

"Oh, confound it all!" cried the young man, springing up. "I beg your pardon, Baroness, but how can you say such things to me? I declare," he protested with a laugh, "if I had not the sweetest and most candid nature in the

world, you and Emilia would have ruined it long ago. I come and tell you all my troubles, and this is the way I am met. It is a premium on telling lies, you'll allow. I shall take to telling them."

"Oh, I dare say you are as capable of it as the rest of the world," said the Baroness; "only you would always be found out. Besides, we should find you dull company. We like hearing your troubles, as the amiable formula has it."

"Well, I'm sure I gratify you," he said. He came to her side, and stood gazing at the work she was engaged on, absently and a little frowningly at first, then with an expression that cleared.

"That is charming," he said; "that is one of the best things you have done. But you have embellished your subject. Miss Verrinder is not so pretty as that."

"Yes, yes, she is quite as pretty," said the Baroness; "you have never found it out, I dare say, because she is always too shy to speak when you are present. That is how she will look in a year or two, when she has gained confidence, and is more alive, perhaps, to her own charm."

Gordon looked at it for a minute in silence. "By the by," he said, "it is an odd coincidence, but you know that necklace Miss Verrinder had on the other night? It is a fine piece of Oriental work. Well, I went to-day into Levi's shop—the antiquary, you know—to look at some engraved amulets he has, and I saw one exactly like it——"

"What!" cried Madame von Leuwine, "then she has sold it!"

"Sold it? Why, what do you mean?" said the young man.

"Heavens!" cried the Baroness, without heeding him; "what dreadful scrape has that unhappy child got herself into? I did think she was to be trusted." She ran to the window and flung it open. "Elisabeth!" she cried.

Elisabeth sadly wandering in the garden below gathering and bedewing her flowers, looked up startled.

"Elisabeth, come here, I want to speak to you," said the Baroness. She closed the window, and came back into the room. "Now I understand," she said, "or rather, I understand nothing. But I will understand; yes, yes, I will have no more nonsense."

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" said her companion.

"Matter!" said the Baroness, pulling off her big working apron, and rubbing the clay from her fingers; the next moment she tied the apron on again, and took up a fresh lump of clay. "The matter is that I tell Elisabeth, not half an hour ago, to bring me her necklace to-morrow; and she can and she can't, and she will and she won't; and she hasn't lost it and she hasn't got it; and a mystery, in short, that she can't explain; and all the while it is there in Levi's shop. But there shall be no more mysteries; I will have the whole history from beginning to end. Oh, these girls! I wish to heaven sometimes they were all lay-figures, that I might pull their arms and legs into right position without trouble. I could dispense with their silly brains. Ah, there she is; now I will have the truth. Elisabeth," she began instantly, as the culprit appeared in the doorway, "what made you sell your necklace to Mr. Levi?"

Elisabeth turned scarlet, then white. She leant back against the doorpost as if about to faint; but the Baroness was merciless.

"What," she repeated, "made you sell your necklace, Elisabeth?"

"Excuse me," said Gordon, hastily taking up his hat, "but I must be off, Baroness. I shall see you again this evening."

"Yes, yes, be off," she said, nodding, "and shut the door after you, if you please. Now, Elisabeth," as the two were left alone together, "tell me the truth. Why did you sell your necklace? Did you want money?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, with a profound sigh.

"Then, why on earth didn't you come to me, my dear child? Did you suppose I should eat you?"

"Oh, I didn't like to!" said Elisabeth, painfully. "I was afraid."

"Afraid to tell me of some scrape you've got into, I suppose? Well, what is your scrape? Tell me all about it; I won't scold you more than I can help."

Elisabeth tried to speak, but her voice failed. The Baroness watched her in real anxiety; she had not presided over the destinies of some hundred girls without more than one painful experience. At last Elisabeth spoke:

"I lost my purse," she said, falteringly, "on board the Rhine steamer coming to Schlossberg."

"Oh, you lost your purse?" said the Baroness, not relaxing her attention; "and what then?"

"I had no money—none at all," said Elisabeth; "and

my through ticket to Schlossberg was in the purse, too ; I didn't know what to do, or how to get on ; and then someone—a gentleman I had been talking to—lent me some money."

"Oh, these girls!" said the Baroness. "And who was the gentleman, if I may inquire, my dear?"

"It was—it was Mr. Holland," said Elisabeth, getting very red. "He was very, very kind to me."

"Mr. Holland—do you mean Robert Holland, the clergyman, Madame von Waldorf's brother? Why didn't you tell me at once, my dear, instead of dragging me through such a nightmare? But now I don't understand why you sold your necklace."

"It was because I had no money to pay him back," said Elisabeth. She took breath in another profound sigh. "Mr. Holland had no change," she said ; "he had only a hundred-mark note that he lent me. He told me to be very careful of it, but I—I spent it, because I had no money to pay my bill at the Kaiserhof. And when I told Mr. Holland, he said that it wasn't—he said that it wasn't honest to spend money I couldn't repay. And so I sold my necklace."

There was a moment's silence ; Elisabeth read in it her condemnation. The tears quivered on her lashes. "I didn't want not to he honest," she said, pleadingly, raising her eyes to the Baroness's face.

"Naturally," said the Baroness, in a tone of great cheerfulness, "nobody wants not to be honest. As for you, my dear Elisabeth, you are a goose ; the rest of the proceedings I will not characterize--no," she said, "I will not characterize them." She sat down at her writing-table, scribbled off a note, then tore it into fragments, and swept them with an impetuous movement on the floor. "No," she said, "there are things that cannot be characterized ; it is best to be silent ; but heavens! what a relief a little plain speaking would be occasionally." She went up to where Elisabeth stood motionless, leaning against a corner of the table.

"My dear child," she said, with extraordinary kindness —"But don't cry ; I positively will not have another tear ; you have nearly spoilt my day's work as it is, with your red eyes—so, that is better. You are a little goose, my dear, as I said before, but you are not otherwise to blame in the matter—at least, yes, you are to blame, since you should have written to your aunt—oh, you couldn't?—well, then, you should have told me, who am more or less re-

sponsible for you just now, of your loss and the money you owed. Otherwise, there is no harm in the world done, so far as you are concerned. But next time you want a hundred marks, tell me, and don't sell your necklace. You sold it for a hundred marks, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth; "I didn't know whether it was worth so much. The man said at first that it wasn't; afterwards he said he would give it to me."

"That was very obliging of him," said the Baroness. "At the same time, my dear child, when you next want to sell a necklace you will let me know that also, will you not? And now suppose we finish our sitting."

The Baroness—who, after all, was not at all in the habit of depriving herself of such comfort as may be derived from a little plain speaking—expressed herself with great openness that evening on the subject of Robert Holland. The two ladies were seated after dinner in the salon, together with Gordon Temple, who had joined them, Emilia embroidering by the light of the lamp that illuminated her work-table. The Baroness, leaning back in her arm-chair, her large, well-shaped hands folded in her lap, did not hesitate to offer her opinion on what she had heard that day with the energy that not unfrequently distinguished her speech.

"I am burning with indignation," she declared. "I said this afternoon, Emilia, that your brother's proceedings could not be characterized; but they may be characterized in a word—they are not the proceedings of a gentleman."

Madame von Waldorf colored a little. She was embroidering a frock for her little daughter, and continued to set the stitches without replying.

"I do not see," the Baroness continued, rather unreasonably resenting this silence, "how you are concerned to defend your brother, Emilia. That poor child had been bullied into thinking she had committed some dreadful crime in using the money he had lent her. You can imagine what she thought when she simply ran straight out of the house and sold her necklace to repay him at once. And yet you defend him!"

"Dear Aunt Irma, I have not said a word," said Emilia, letting her work fall into her lap. "After all—after all, however," she said, resuming her needle, Robert is my father's son, and I find it difficult to believe him so bad as

you make him out to be. Probably we have not heard the whole story. In any case, Elisabeth Verrinder does not strike me as a very wise little person."

"I have heard the whole story," said the Baroness; "Elisabeth spent the afternoon with me. And when she had recovered from the extraordinary agitation into which merely mentioning the subject at first threw her, I made her tell me the whole thing twice over in detail. She is a very wise little person, my dear Emilia; she has more brains than twenty of your ordinary girls put together. But it is true that she is also a little goose. She brought no accusation whatever against Robert, but apparently regards him as an archangel, and herself as to blame from beginning to end."

"You did not undeceive her?" said Madame von Waldorf, with gentle sarcasm.

"I have too much respect for a young girl's illusions," said the Baroness, drily. "Elisabeth considers herself under immense obligations to Robert Holland. If I had represented his conduct to her in its true light, it would have been enough to disenchant her with life."

Gordon Temple uttered a brief laugh, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, began to walk up and down the room. Emilia looked up.

"You—you exasperate me, both of you," she cried, smiling still; "but you, Gordon, especially. What, after all, can you bring against Robert that you should always affect this tone about him?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever, I assure you," he said, throwing himself into his chair again, and taking up a book. "On the contrary, I believe him to be an excellent parish priest; and as for personal knowledge, until this morning I had not seen him for nearly ten years."

"As for Aunt Irma," continued Madame von Waldorf, "I believe she and Robert quarrelled fatally when she tried to take his likeness years ago; she has never had a good word for him since. What, after all, is his crime now? He very good-naturedly lends a young girl, a total stranger to him, a hundred marks on board the Rhine boat, and in course of time expects his money back. Robert is not rich; a hundred marks are probably of importance to him. I see no reason why Miss Verrinder should not repay him. It is her own doing that she should sell her necklace. You do not imagine, I suppose, that he requested her to do so?"

"Oh, my dear Emilia!" said the Baroness, waving her hand, "you know better than all that, my dear child. However, defend Robert, by all means, if it amuses you; we all three of us know your brother pretty well, so it does no harm. No; I have no idea that he knew anything of Elisabeth's necklace. The question with me now is how to get it back to her. It belonged to her mother; it nearly broke her heart to part with it."

The Baroness sat meditating a moment. "I don't want to give it back to her myself," she said; "it would be against my principles. She had no business to sell it, naughty child; I told her so. She won't believe me if I give it her again."

"Ah, that necklace," said Gordon, laying down his book; "it is well it is not in Ida's possession by this time. If I were not the impecunious wretch I can't get accustomed to, I should straightway have bought it of Levi to-day. I did inquire the price."

"Ida is a little savage; a string of beads would please her as well," said her mother, smiling. "Dear Aunt Irma, there need be no difficulty whatever about the necklace. Certainly, Miss Verrinder ought to have it back, and I will buy it with pleasure. It is my concern, if it is anyone's in the world."

"It is your brother Robert's concern," said the Baroness, promptly; "but don't imagine I think it would be worth while to suggest his buying it. That, however, is not all the difficulty." She reflected a moment. "If you and she were better friends Emilia——"

"No, I am aware she does not like me very much," said Madame von Waldorf, gently. "I do not find her easy to get on with, as the phrase is."

"And that being the case," said the Baroness, solving the problem with decision, "our best plan will be for you, or me, or someone to get the necklace and give it to your brother to return to Elisabeth. It will be a proper reparation for frightening the girl nearly out of her wits; it will cost him nothing; I don't see how he can object. Yes, that will arrange everything; and here comes Ida to put a stop to our quarrelling any more about it. Why are you not in bed, Ida? What keeps you up, child, till this hour?"

"Cousin Gordon told me he was going away at nine o'clock," said the child, "and I told nurse I shouldn't go to bed till then, because I want to shut the front door after him."

"Dear me, Ida, you must be in a great hurry to see me off the premises," said her cousin, taking her on his knee. "Have you come to tell me it's time to go? I don't believe it's nine o'clock yet."

"Yes, it is; yes, it is," said Ida, fidgeting down again; "come along, I want to see you go out into the dark and shut the big door after you. Bang it goes, and there you are outside and me inside."

"What a heartless speech!" said her cousin; "is that how you'll treat me when you're my wife, Ida?"

"Oh, I'm not going to be your wife——never," cried Ida. "I'm going to marry nurse's boy; his name is Fritz; he's bigger than me, and I see him go by to school every day. Nurse gave me some red wool to knit him some mittens; it was to match his cheeks, she said. I love him very much, and as soon as ever we're growed up, I'm going to marry him. Now, come along."

"Hush, Ida," said her mother, "don't tease your cousin. Why must you go, Gordon? Is your father expecting you?"

"Well, I told him I should be back early," said the young man; "besides I have some work to do. As these will be my last lectures here, they should be something splendid! Now, Ida, I am coming, but what I propose is, that I should shut the door, that you should be outside and I remain inside. What do you say to that?"

CHAPTER XIX.

SUNDAY AT THE PENSION WERNER.

The German Protestant church, which by an amicable agreement lent itself during certain hours on Sunday for the uses of Anglican worship, was closed for repairs that would occupy the winter months; and during this interval the English service was held twice every Sunday in the large dining-room of Frau Werner's pension. The good lady had lent herself willingly to this arrangement, which, while involving certain inconveniences, was, she held, an admirable advertisement of her establishment among the English visitors to Schlossberg. Every Sunday morning, therefore, by eleven o'clock, the long dining-board was cleared away, and all the chairs the resources of the house

could furnish were ranged in rows from end to end of the apartment; a small harmonium, that had been hired for these occasions, occupying a place of honor near the window. The final result was not too imposing. A sideboard with rather dingy wineglasses and tarnished metal dishes maintained its position, with a somewhat incongruous effect; while the disarrangement of the furniture made more apparent certain stains on the walls, certain frayed patches in the carpet; the renewal of paper and paint and carpet yielding always to other and more pressing claims on Frau Werner's meagre purse. These deficiencies were not condoned by the numbers and dignity of the congregation. Mr. Sparrow was not popular among the English residents in Schlossberg; and of these, not a few took advantage of the temporary suspension of the regular English services to attend the German service at the second large Lutheran Church, which accommodated the greater portion of the Protestant inhabitants of the town. Nevertheless, a steady, if somewhat thin stream of best bonnets and feathered hats made its way to Frau Werner's door every Sunday morning, and their owners, sparsely scattered on the rows of hard chairs, and duly uttering the responses, offered a sufficiently respectable semblance of a devout congregation.

On a Sunday morning some ten days after the events recorded in our last chapter, the stream that approached the door in the Peterstrasse was denser than usual, the seats filled with a certain rapidity. A rumor had gone abroad that, Mr. Sparrow being indisposed, his place would be taken by the Rev. Robert Holland; and the prospect of a little religious dissipation, taking the form of a new preacher and one accredited with some gift of eloquence, was sufficient to attract a very considerable number of the stray sheep of Mr. Sparrow's flock. Mr. Sparrow, looking down on the street from the window of the room to which indisposition confined him, noted the fact with something of natural resentment; it should not—certainly, he decided, it need not—occur again. His wife, meanwhile, had far too much on her mind for any sense of resentment; for anything, indeed, but the liveliest, the most cheerful excitement and sense of responsibility. In her husband's absence she had, she felt, to do all the honors of the church. She always superintended the arrangement of the room, but to-day she gave an extra twitch to every chair, and herself marked the Psalms and Lessons in the big

official Bible and Prayer-book, so as to obviate any awkward mistakes on the part of Mr. Holland, who, it was to be supposed, might probably forget the day of the month and the Sunday of the year. She might further have imparted a good deal of useful and occult information to the Vicar of Thornton Briars on the methods of conducting the Anglican Church service in a pension dining-room, methods that had a certain unexpectedness, due to the absence of pulpit and reading-desk, clerk and vestry; but here she was arrested by her husband. "I have explained everything to Holland, my dear," he said, pettishly; "he knows all about it;" and Mrs. Sparrow was silenced. But she was consoled by the conviction that there would certainly be several points in Mr. Holland's sermon so little agreeable to pure gospel truth as to afford subject for a great deal of edifying conversation afterwards, both with himself and others. With this enlivening prospect before her, she arrayed herself in unusual splendor, and took her seat quite early, so as to have an eye to the due marshalling of the company.

And meanwhile, up-stairs in her sloping attic chamber, one little heart was fluttering and beating with an excitement that made its owner at moments feel quite faint and sick as she arranged her hair and put on her hat before the glass. As a rule, Elisabeth entertained the most lively aversion to the religious functions at the Pension Werner. In the strain after that high ideal, that pure emotion, which constituted her conception of the religious life, nothing commoner than the soaring arches, the dusky vistas of pillared aisles beneath some high cathedral roof, seemed absolutely appropriate to the worship of an aspiring soul; she would sooner, she said to herself—and the sentiment expressed the lowest depth to which Elisabeth's imagination could carry her in that direction—she would sooner say her prayers in some whitewashed meeting-house than in Frau Werner's dining-room. The conditions, too, under which she was expected to say those prayers, furnished her further opportunities for discontent. Going slowly down-stairs, prayer-book in hand, at about ten minutes to eleven on the first Sunday after her arrival, she encountered Mrs. Sparrow, bonneted, cloaked, gloved, veiled, accompanied by her daughter, similarly attired in walking costume. Mrs. Sparrow eyed Elisabeth, dressed in her Sunday frock as she had appeared at breakfast, with some severity.

"My dear," she said, "are you not going to church?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, eying Mrs. Sparrow in her turn with some surprise; "but I thought the service was held in the house now."

"Certainly it is held in the house," said Mrs. Sparrow with unabated severity; "but that is no reason, my dear Elisabeth, why you should not be decently apparelled. To appear as you are now, is an act of disrespect at once to the church and to your pastor. Look at Mary; I should never permit her to appear with uncovered head, and with simply her morning frock on. Run up-stairs, my dear child, and put on your hat and jacket—and don't forget your gloves," Mrs. Sparrow added, as Elisabeth moved somewhat reluctantly away.

Every Sunday morning, then, found Elisabeth elaborately donning her out-door attire to sit for a couple of hours in the dining-room, where half an hour later she took her accustomed place with the other *pensionnaires* to share the mid-day meal. Elisabeth's sense of humor was latent in those young days; but it did cross her mind one day to ask Mrs. Sparrow if she should not also bring her umbrella. She locked up the ribald question, however, in her profane little heart, and resignedly took her place every Sunday morning, and not unfrequently again on Sunday afternoon, at Mrs. Sparrow's side. It added not a little to her discomfort that that large lady invariably secured the central seat in the front row, a comfortable arm-chair that she caused to be conveyed there from the salon as a tribute to her dignity; and Elisabeth seated at her side, not only felt herself a conspicuous object to the roomful of people behind her, but under the immediate fire—douche it should, perhaps, be more justly designated—of Mr. Sparrow's cold and disapproving eye. How the poor child chafed through the long monotonous service, the long dogmatic sermons! She envied everyone: she envied Mary Sparrow at the harmonium, with the recurrent diversion of making the wheezy instrument squeak, the recurrent excitement of discovering how many notes would fail to sound each time she struck a chord; she envied Frau Werner's children, whose sportive shrieks could be heard in the passage outside, till suddenly hushed and suppressed by their mother or stout Käthchen, the maid, they were borne off captive, but still giggling, to some distant back premises; she envied Frau Werner herself, who—far too much occupied, poor soul, with household cares to spare

a long morning to spiritual observances—was busy in the kitchen over the pots and pans that would presently furnish forth the superior Sunday dinner. Elisabeth, in short, envied anyone and everyone as compared with her own bored and conscious-stricken self, stricken with a terrible sense of her own spiritual disabilities. Were people, could people ever be good enough, to enjoy coming to church in a pension dining-room with Mr. Sparrow's harsh voice to grate through the prayers, and Mary's flat tones to lead off the wavering psalmody? She supposed there could be; certainly there could be; it was only she herself who was not good enough. Elisabeth, seated on the edge of her bed in the seclusion of her own room after the service, her head drooping, her hat hanging in her hand, sometimes found her eyes fill with tears at the contemplation of her own iniquity, her incapacity to call up appropriate emotion. She only found consolation in the resolve that the following Sunday should find her in a more truly spiritual frame of mind.

On the particular Sunday morning, however, with which this chapter opens, Elisabeth, as has been said, was putting on her hat with a heart beating and fluttering with excitement. Nothing in the world, it seemed to her, could be quite so momentous as that Mr. Holland should preach and that she should hear him. She had seen little of the clergyman since that stirring episode of ten days back; an extreme shyness, an undefined emotion that sent the blood rushing to her cheeks if she only heard his footsteps in the hall, his voice in the distance, had led her to shun him. But every day Mr. Holland had found occasion to say a few kind words to her, and this meagre fare had been to the girl the feast on which she lived. She pulled her hat well over her eyes, took up her prayer-book, and ran down-stairs. The hall was filled with people making their way into the dining-room, and Elisabeth was seized with dread lest her usual seat at Mrs. Sparrow's side should be filled; she did not want to sit anywhere else to-day. But no, it was still empty. Elisabeth slipped into it quietly, and opening her prayer-book, sat patiently awaiting the commencement of the service. She did not feel wicked to-day; she felt good, good, good. For her also a spiritual atmosphere seemed for once to pervade the incongruous place of worship.

The service, it may be briefly stated, was an immediate shock to her. Mr. Holland had cultivated the art of un-

emotional reading, and succeeded probably beyond his desire. His delivery was singularly monotonous and ineffective ; Elisabeth could have cried with disappointment over his see-saw elocution. But with the sermon there came a change. The Vicar of Thornton Briars preached well, and he knew it ; and the knowledge gave him the confidence that attends all effective achievements. His grave voice took persuasive, even eloquent tones ; an expression of dignity, lighted up now and again by fires of animation, gave elevation to his face, refined and worn by illness. He took for his text, " For the kingdom of heaven is within you." This is not the place for a sermon, nor indeed, does it concern us except in regard to its effect on our heroine ; but the clergyman's lucid and eloquent exposition of his theme, his argument that the kingdom of heaven is not as the kingdoms of this world, to be won by outward strife, nor yet a heritage postponed beyond the grave, but that through self-denial, through humility, through purity of life and intention and intimate union with the Divine will, we can already in this life enter into possession of that immense and all-satisfying inheritance, arrested the attention of all his hearers. The theme was not a new one ; but he was in earnest, and his earnestness impressed itself on his audience. Mrs. Sparrow forgot to be captious, and thought the sermon almost as good as one of her husband's discourses. As for Elisabeth, she had almost forgotten where she was ; nay, though never more intensely self-conscious, she had for a moment, in a sense, almost forgotten herself. She sat with parted lips, her hat pushed back from her forehead, her eyes fixed upon Mr. Holland. A path, down which the Divine glory streamed, seemed opening straight before her into heaven. Religion was such a storm-tossed subject to Elisabeth ; her little boat drifted so rudderless to and fro on that strange ocean on which her teachers had launched her ; not a rudder she had tried but had proved a broken reed when she hoped to steer with it. But this, surely, was what she had sought ; here was the help she had so sorely needed.

Mr. Holland was sufficiently accustomed to the spectacle of thirsty young souls, athirst through the ardent and pathetic aspirations of youth, hanging on his words. Nevertheless, his glance happening to encounter Elisabeth's, as he stood nearly facing her, something in the intensity of its expression struck him. Elisabeth's eyes met Mr. Holland's but she did not blush, as was her wont ; her

lip only quivered, her eyes widened a little like a child's who appeals in trouble where it has trust it will be comforted. In the same instant some words flashed across Mr. Holland's mind so vividly as to bring a perceptible pause in his sermon. They were the words: "She will have three hundred a year of her own." He recovered himself instantly, and went on preaching as before; but the words did not pass from his mind. They seemed to him all at once so charged with a thousand suggestions that they ran backwards and forwards, as it were, all through the remainder of his discourse. Happily it was one of his best sermons; he had preached it several times before; he knew how to make the points, if the term may be permitted, without necessarily bringing his entire mind to bear upon what he was saying. His congregation were no less impressed by the close than by the beginning, though the preacher's own thoughts had somewhat wandered from the kingdom of heaven to a very earthly kingdom indeed. As for Elisabeth, she no more doubted that these utterances that had touched her deepest consciousness proceeded from the lips of one who stood in the Divine light within those golden gates, toward which she, a wavering dim-eyed pilgrim, struggled with faltering feet, than if he had stood in visible robes of glory before her eyes.

Mr. Holland withdrew immediately on the conclusion of the service, leaving the congregation to disperse. He had hardly, however, divested himself of the surplice in which he had preached, to Mrs. Sparrow's mingled joy and horror (it assisted her to remember afterwards that there was, after all, very little pure gospel truth in Mr. Holland's sermon), when he was summoned to Frau Werner's private sitting-room; his sister was there and had asked to speak to him. Madame von Waldorf had seen little of her brother since his arrival in Schlossberg; beyond one or two formal visits they had not met. Mr. Holland disliked going to her house; and the air of grave disapproval with which he habitually regarded her and her surroundings testified to the fact. Emilia entered no protest; she had the habit of defending her half-brother in his absence, but she found no special pleasure in his presence. She had come to hear him preach, however (in general she attended the German Lutheran church); she considered it an attention, a compliment she owed to her father's son; and at the conclusion of the service she sent a message, begging the favor of a few words with him.

Mr. Holland obeyed the summons with reluctance ; he was exceedingly tired ; it might have occurred to Emilia, he reflected, that he would be tired—that whatever she had to say might be postponed. To do Madame von Waldorf justice, it did occur to her the moment she saw him enter the room with his feeble step. He looked at her with the air of gravity that seldom relaxed in her presence. He disapproved of her—of her sweet blooming health and serenity, of her furs and her velvet and the vague perfume that floated about her ; they all expressed that prosperity in which he had no share. He did not even look at little Ida who had come with her mother, and who, perched on a table with a large piece of cake that the excellent Frau Werner had hastened to draw forth from some cupboard, contemplated her uncle with a child's wide-eyed, deliberate stare. He shook hands with his half-sister without either word or smile.

"How tired you look, my dear Robert," said Madame von Waldorf, with compunction, "it was thoughtless of me to ask to see you now."

"I am exceedingly fatigued," he said, sinking into an armchair ; "it is the first time since my illness began that I have taken the service." There was a minute's silence. "You had something to say to me?" he said then.

"It will not take two minutes," said Madame von Waldorf with a certain embarrassment. "But first," she went on, blushing very charmingly, "you must allow me, Robert —you must allow me to thank you for your admirable sermon. It is the first time I have heard you preach ; you must forgive my saying I had no idea how eloquent a preacher you are."

"You are very good," he replied, closing his eyes with an air of indifference. Then, with a momentary glance at her : "I should not have supposed it," he said, "the sort of sermon that would especially appeal to you."

Madame von Waldorf was hurt, but with her customary sweetness she endeavored not to show it. "They were words that should appeal to everyone, I think," she said, gently. "That, however," she immediately continued, "was not what I came to speak about. It was to ask you, Robert, to be good enough to execute a little commission for me. I have here a necklace belonging to Miss Verrinder."

"To Miss Verrinder?" said her brother, turning half round in his chair.

"Yes, to Miss Verrinder. She has behaved like a foolish child; but the matter can easily, I think, be set right. You lent her, I believe, some money, Robert?"

He did not immediately answer. "That is a matter there can be no occasion to refer to," he said then with a certain rigidity; "it is already arranged."

"I am aware—I am aware," said Emilia. She was exceedingly ill at ease. The Baroness herself could not have set her brother's conduct before her in a more glaring light than that in which it presented itself at that moment. She wished now she had written instead of speaking on the subject. "I am aware that it is settled," she said, "but at a cost that I—that we none of us can permit. Miss Verrinder, in order to repay her debt to you, parted with a valuable necklace."

"Miss Verrinder———" Mr. Holland began, but checked himself. "I was not aware of it," he said, stiffly.

"Certainly, no one imagined that you were," said Madame von Waldorf, with more coldness than she had yet shown. She paused again. "It came, however, to my knowledge," she went on, "and I could not permit that so trifling a debt should be repaid at so heavy a cost. I have therefore, repurchased the necklace."

Mr. Holland turned his eyes on her for a minute. "You speak much at your ease," he said, slowly raising himself in his chair, "of trifling debts. The different circumstances of our life, however, probably necessitate a different point of view. Kindly inform me what it is you wish me to do."

"I wish you," said Madame von Waldorf, taking a packet from her muff—"I would ask you, that is, Robert, to be good enough to return her necklace to Miss Verrinder. She has acted, as I said, like a foolish child; she ought, of course, to have applied in her difficulty to Aunt Irma, who would have given her the money for you at once; or, more properly still, to her aunt in England. She seems, however, to be really only a child in practical matters, and to have acted on impulse under great distress of mind."

Madame von Waldorf paused. Something perhaps in her tone, if not in her words, implied a certain blame, from which Mr. Holland seemed impelled to defend himsslf. "All this," he said slowly, "is news to me. Miss Verrinder is a young lady in whom I take some interest. I certainly suggested the repayment of a sum of money that, whatever it may appear to you, is of no little con-

sequence to me. Miss Verrinder, as you say, is a child in practical affairs; the matter might easily have slipped from her memory altogether. I know nothing of this acute distress of mind of which you speak. You will permit me to add, Emilia, that the tone you allow yourself in speaking to me sounds very strangely in my ears. It is one to which I am hardly accustomed. Inferiority of fortune does not necessarily imply inferiority of position."

He turned as though to leave the room; Madame von Waldorf arrested him. The tone the conversation had taken was odious to her; there was nothing she held more in horror than the commonness, the ugliness of a wordy controversy. The presence of little Ida seemed to emphasize the ugliness; the child lived habitually in the atmosphere of sweet and reasonable forbearance that made her mother's ideal of life. But Ida was paying no heed; having finished her cake, her attention was entirely absorbed by the enlargement of a minute hole where a stitch had slipped in one of the white knitted gaiters that protected her stout little legs. Emilia laid her hand on her half-brother's arm.

"Dear Robert," she said, with an accent of real distress, "I must have expressed myself strangely indeed for you to interpret my words after so strange a fashion. But let us leave discussion. My request, after all, is a very simple one. Will you kindly return Miss Verrinder her necklace without saying how it came into your possession? It will be better, I think, that my name should not be mentioned. I do not know Miss Verrinder very well, and it might reasonably annoy her that I should be mixed up in the matter. The simplest, the most gracious way would be for you to return it to her, leaving her to understand that it has come to your knowledge——"

"Excuse my interrupting you," said Mr. Holland. "I am willing to restore the trinket to Miss Verrinder; but you will permit me, Emilia, to be myself the judge of the best method of doing so."

He took the parcel from his sister's hand, and without further words left the room. Madame von Waldorf stood absolutely disconcerted for a moment; it could never have occurred to her, she said to herself, that her brother Robert could show himself in a light so little advantageous; certainly no one had ever spoken to her after quite such a fashion before. Emilia was accustomed to what she called her cousin Gordon's snubbings; she was not accustomed

to being made to feel that she had acted disagreeably and put herself in the wrong. She was roused by Ida's cry of glee.

"See, mamma," she cried, "I've made the beautifullest hole ; I can see the pink through."

Madame von Waldorf lifted her daughter from the table, and entertained her on the way home by a relation of the sad consequences that might attend on making holes in knitted gaiters ; a relation to which Ida listened, it may be said, with the large incredulity of a healthy child who has, so far, had no consciousness of consequences at all. Nothing could appear quite so great a joke to Ida as sad consequences.

Mr. Holland, meanwhile, whose experience of consequences was a sufficiently varied one, had withdrawn to the silence of his own apartment. He was, as he had said, exceedingly fatigued. He had intended to pay a visit to his brother-clergyman at the conclusion of the service ; instead, he rang the bell, desired the red-armed maid, who presently appeared, to serve him his dinner in his own room, and sinking into an arm-chair, sat motionless for awhile with the sense of exhaustion that precludes thought. No one came near him ; the pension guests were engaged in taking off their bonnets, in discussing the sermon, in preparing for the midday meal ; and presently the isolation in which he found himself—that singular isolation of the solitary sojourner in an hotel full of people—struck painfully on the lonely man. At home, a dozen people would have been ready to press round him after the service, to minister to his wants, to suggest one thing or another for his comfort. An extreme depression, the reaction from his morning's efforts, fell upon him now. Mr. Holland was at no time a man who courted loneliness ; he had a social temper ; he had found nothing uncongenial in the trivial gayeties of his parish, in the tea-drinkings, in the sociable suppers that succeeded school-room and choir practices ; and these had been of sufficient frequency in the days of his health and energy to leave him little time for any of the lonely sensations proper to a bachelor. He was not a reading man ; outside his work he had few resources, as people say. His tastes were not very elevated, but they were respectable ; they had sufficed him ; he missed the satisfaction of them now. Some compensation he had found in the social life of the pension ; but in a moment of depression like the present, the compensation

could present itself in no very flattering light. Almost he resolved to throw up the game, to go back to his parish and die, if die he must, among his own people. It was a tragic moment for this middle-aged, middle-class clergyman, cut off at once from the work that he loved, and from which he drew all the elevation of which he was capable, and from the mild diversions of his once energetic life. It marked the lowest ebb to which his spirit had fallen.

The arrival of his dinner roused him, and food and wine presently revived his courage ; he began to pull himself together again. Nevertheless, the sense of loneliness left by his hour of depression did not pass ; he felt horribly lonely. He began to move feebly about his room, trying to put things into some order. Mr. Holland was a tidy man without neatness ; it fidgeted him, that is to say, to see things out of their exact places—it interfered with his conception of the economy of life—but he had no special gift for keeping them there ; and red-armed Käthchen, with twenty rooms on her hands every day had a special gift for leaving them untouched. Presently he desisted with a sigh, and sinking again into his armchair, he took up the packet confided to him by his sister. It was wrapped in paper, and secured by a ribbon only. With a movement of curiosity, Mr. Holland untied the ribbon, removed the paper, and taking the necklace from its case, contemplated it for a moment. A pretty trinket, he decided, and of value, doubtless, though he knew little about such things. The faint scent of roses that clung about Madame von Waldorf's possessions greeted him now ; but he perceived it for once without offence. The perfume, the necklace, seemed to him a rich suggestion of three hundred a year hanging, possibly hanging, should he care to grasp it, within his reach. He replaced the necklace, retied the ribbon, and set himself to consider seriously.

Mr. Holland was not fatuous ; but the extraordinary hold that a popular clergyman has upon the enthusiasms and sympathies of women is a factor in his life that the least fatuous of men can hardly ignore. The Vicar of Thornton Briars, as a prudent man, had behaved in his parish with unimpeachable discretion. But without giving the matter much consideration, he concluded he should have no very great difficulty, if he really desired it, in winning the affection of a young girl like Elisabeth Verrinder. His meditations lay all on the other side ; would Miss Verrinder make him a suitable wife ? On the whole,

he concluded, there was no reason why she should not. She was a good, honest, religious-minded girl ; that he had no difficulty in perceiving ; ignorant, probably, a little heedless, certainly ; but no great harm in that. She was young, and would improve, especially under his care and guidance. He would instruct her, he would form her ; the probably blank page of her experience would suit him better than the settled opinions of an older woman, which might possibly come into collision with his own. Mr. Holland had thought differently on the occasion of his former engagement, his proposed wife having been a few years older than himself ; but to shift a point of view to meet altered circumstances is not always an inexcusable vagary of the human mind ; and Mr. Holland might certainly have held himself justified had he been actively conscious of this change of front. As a fact, he was not ; it simply occurred to him that there was a particular charm about a young girl with three hundred a year, whose ignorance of life would leave her plastic to any moulding. That he was just double her age did not affect the matter in his mind ; at six-and-thirty he could not consider himself old ; there need be no question of incompatibility on that score. No, on the whole, Mr. Holland concluded, he could not well do better. A certain risk must attend every marriage ; but as few, it seemed to him, waited on such a marriage as this as could be expected by imperfect humanity. He would no longer be alone ; he would have a companion when he was depressed, a nurse when he was sick, a waiting-maid to keep his things in order——Mr. Holland did not express it to himself quite so crudely as this, but there was hardly less crudity in the matter of his thoughts. Above all, the three hundred a year cleared the prospect before him so immensely, that with such a recommendation almost any wife might have been an acceptable appendage. He himself would have said quite openly that he could not afford to marry a wife without money ; the rewards bestowed by the Church on its servants were not sufficiently liberal to warrant it. The sentiment may seem a mercenary one for a clergyman ; but Mr. Holland, having made up his mind not to marry unless he could find a wife with a fortune, would have been profoundly surprised had this somewhat nude resolution been treated as anything but the result of the most obvious prudence. The resolution, in fact, had much to recommend it ; it was perhaps simply its nudity that made

it seem a trifle objectionable. A man of finer fibre might have draped it with some reserves, have admitted the possibility in certain cases of consideration of sentiment outweighing those of income. Mr. Holland admitted none of these subtleties; he had the habit of looking the situation in the face. He would not have married a bad or irreligious woman, whatever her fortune might be; but beyond this, he had no reserve whatever. It would be acceptable to him to have a larger income; if it came in his way, he would take it if he could. It is perhaps to his credit that it had come in his way, and that it had not occurred to him definitively to take it until that moment, big with fate, when his eyes had met Elisabeth's, and the words "She will have three hundred a year" had crossed the pages of his sermon. As the words came into his mind once more, he looked again at the packet beside him on the table. No, on the whole, he decided, he could not do better. Three hundred a year with an inexpensive wife—a clergyman's wife had no right to be expensive; twenty or thirty pounds a year for dress and pocket-money should certainly suffice for her personal needs—would, in addition to his present income, set everything on an easy footing. Decidedly, he could not do better.

The above reflections passed with a certain listlessness through Mr. Holland's mind as he sat reclined in his armchair. The sad indifference which is the trail physical weakness is apt to leave on all the interests of life opposed itself just then to any very keen sentiment of any kind. The odious nature of these reflections, in which he, a sickly, and possibly—should ill-health in the future compel him to resign his living—a needy man, proposed to appropriate to his own benefit at once the fortune and the fresh affection of a young and ignorant girl, could never have been made apparent to him. A man's conscience may become the most fallacious of guides; once let him convince himself it is infallible, and no calculation can foresee the singular and tortuous paths along which it may lead him. Finally, it is the conscience that lags behind, and the most conscientious of men may exhibit himself as the most unscrupulous. For years Mr. Holland's conscience had assured him of unwavering rectitude of purpose. He acted constantly on what he held to be high principle; he was aware, as he would himself have said, of the weak points in his spiritual armor, and strengthened them as a Christian should. The very fact that in a

moment of youthful passion he had committed an action that had set him actually within reach of the law, and might have blasted his prospects for life, had added to his sense of mental security. It had been a huge moral shock to him ; it had driven him terror-stricken to repentance ; but that passage of profound humility had cleared him, so to speak, for the remainder of his life. He had almost forgotten his error, but that moral effect remained. He had been purified by a great repentance, he had come out a new man ; and the depths of self-deception, common to every son of Adam, and concerning which he had preached more than one excellent sermon, remained unsuspected in his own case. To make him see his present conduct in its true light would have been as impossible as to make him see his face in a mirror set in a darkened room. It was not altogether his fault if he had learnt to regard the position of mistress of the vicarage of Thornton Briars as one of the most desirable that the great lottery of life offers among its prizes. A dozen women, old and young, scattered about his parish, had helped him to that opinion. But thinking of Elisabeth in her room up-stairs, ignorant of the true prizes of life as the bird who flutters into a net in pursuit of some inconsiderable moth or butterfly, the man who sat spreading the snare for her unsuspecting little feet cannot, perhaps, readily be forgiven. Elisabeth, I say, was in her room ; she had fled thither immediately after dinner as to her happiest refuge. The stove had been lighted. It gave out warmth, but no cheering brightness ; and to-day there would be no western sun to decline and redden behind the hills. The first snow of the season was falling steadily. Roofs and towers and far-stretching plain were all whitening beneath the white shifting veil ; already the small panes of her dormer window were being blocked and darkened by the soft incessant drift ; it was the first touch of the Schlossberg winter. Elisabeth opened the iron door of her stove and threw in some fresh wood, which sent up leaping, crackling flames that brightened the darkness of the winter afternoon. The girl knelt for a moment before the fire, spreading out her hands to the blaze ; then springing up, began pacing up and down the room. An immense restlessness possessed her. The afternoon lay vacant of occupation ; there would be no second service to-day ; and a few weeks earlier Elisabeth would have rejoiced in the sense of leisure, in the freedom secured her by her lonely attic, in that vast show and

spectacle of winter unrolling itself beneath her eyes as she stood gazing out from her warm interior. Alas! that high-set chamber was grown little better than a prison; the freedom she had prized was gone; she felt stifled, crushed between the sloping walls. She opened her door and listened; all the big house seemed wrapped in the quiet of a Sunday after-dinner siesta; the stillness weighed upon her like a suffocating pillow. She wanted movement, she wanted excitement to meet and satisfy this terrible unrest that was like an aching thirst within her. She went back into her room, and took up one after the other, the books that lay upon her table; she laid them all down again; they were her favorite books; there was not one she cared to open even. She would go down to the salon, she thought, and see if there were anything still left unread in Frau Werner's bookcase. Anything to pass the long hours of the afternoon. But for the snow she would have put on her hat and gone for a walk, heedless of the reproof from Mrs. Sparrow that might await her return; but the snow made it impossible to leave the house.

On her way down-stairs she passed the door of Mr. Holland's room, which opened at the head of the staircase on the second floor. The handle turned at the moment of her passing, and Mr. Holland came out. Elisabeth, with an impulse for which she could have given no reason, fled shyly and precipitately down the stairs, never pausing till she was within the salon. Mr. Holland, on the contrary, seeing Elisabeth, stood still for a moment, with his hand on the lock of the door. He had been on his way to visit Mr. Sparrow, whose apartment was at the end of the long corridor on which his own room opened; but this passing vision of a flying Elisabeth diverted him from his first purpose. He went back into his room, took from the table the packet entrusted to him by Madame Von Waldorf, and with his slow step followed the girl down-stairs.

Elisabeth had found the salon empty, and its appearance hardly more engaging than that of her own room. The bookcase was locked, and the key, as she immediately remembered on trying the glass door, hopelessly buried in the pocket of Mrs. Sparrow's Sunday gown; the tables, cleared of all profane literature, were strewn and decorated with such pamphlets and pictured tracts as appeared to that worthy woman most likely to propagate those particular dogmas of which she held herself one of the chosen guardians. Elisabeth had seen them all before; she would not

even look at them now. But she did not go up-stairs again at once ; here, at any rate, was wider space, a larger sense of liberty ; something might pass, something might happen. Nothing could happen up-stairs, unless Mary Sparrow came to invite her to listen to a sermon in her mother's room. As the thought passed through her mind, Elisabeth's heart gave an immense throb ; she had recognized the uncertain, shambling step she would have known among a thousand. She turned round and faced Mr. Holland.

The occasion was not without its emotional side for the clergyman also. Since seeing Elisabeth, some three hours before he had come to a momentous decision: he proposed, sooner or later, to ask the young girl to be his wife. Mr. Holland was a man, not a machine, in spite of the springs of self-interest that formed so large a part of his motive power ; in spite of listlessness, indifference, and ill-health. He looked down on the young face that blushed and grew pale, and blushed again ; at the brown eyes raised to his for a moment as in some mute appeal, and a sense of great kindness filled his heart. He was touched by the charm of youthfulness, and of that guileless ignorance by which he proposed to profit, in the young creature before him. He glanced round the cold-looking, rather sordid pension salon, with its dingy red Utrecht velvet chairs and sofas, its china stove, and the white muslin curtains that seemed to give an added chill to the white world outside, and a feeling of *bien-être* stole over him, a faint glow, the nearest approach to sentiment his chilled heart could know. He looked at Elisabeth with great kindness.

"Well, so here is winter at last," he said, going up to the stove, and spreading out his hands to the radiating warmth. "There's something very cheerless, though, about these stoves ; don't you think so ? They warm the rooms, no doubt, but I miss the cheerful blaze of my own fireside. It makes one feel one's self an exile ; one can't forget one is away from home ; and that is always rather sad, you know."

He drew forward an armchair as he spoke, and, sitting down, stretched out his legs toward the unresponsive stove. Elisabeth, who had been listening with extreme attention and sympathy to these remarks, that seemed to place her in a singularly intimate relation with Mr. Holland's inmost sentiments, started into action.

"Up-stairs, in my own room," she said diffidently, "I

open the door of the stove, and it makes a little square blaze. It's not much, but it is better than nothing. I don't like the stoves either."

"Well, now, that is a good idea," said the clergyman; "suppose we try it here." He threw back the little iron door. "Ah," he said, "the wood is all burnt to ashes; I'm afraid there is no hope of your cheerful blaze, Miss Verrinder, even if we put some fresh wood in."

"Oh, I can make it burn," said Elisabeth, eagerly; "I'll run and ask Käthchen for some splinters and matches. It won't take a minute."

She disappeared, and returned in a moment with an armful of paper and shavings. Mr. Holland's eyes rested on her with increasing pleasure and approbation as, kneeling in front of the stove, she arranged paper and wood and applied a match. Notwithstanding her extreme shyness, there was nothing *gauche* about Elisabeth; her movements had a natural grace, of which no amount of mental awkwardness could rob her; her dark-blue woollen frock, ill-cut though it was, did little injustice to her slender girlish figure, and its color suited the delicate fairness of her cheeks, and the rough wavy masses of brown hair on which the leaping flame threw ruddy lights as she knelt with her head half thrust inside the opening of the stove. She stood up at last, flushed and smiling a little in triumph, rubbing her dusty and blackened fingers against the skirt of her dress, an action that perhaps justified Mrs. Verrinder's small expenditure on her niece's schoolgirl wardrobe. Mr. Holland looked at her attentively, smoothing down his grizzled mustache and beard with his left forefinger.

"That is famous," he said; "that is something like a fire! I have seen nothing so cheerful as that since I came to Schlossberg. Sit down," he went on, with an accent both kindly and peremptory, stretching out his arm and drawing forward a chair; "I should like to have a little talk with you."

Elisabeth sat down as desired. Her heart was beating, but her restlessness was gone. A sense of great happiness was in its place.

"I was pleased to see," Mr. Holland continued, smiling at her, after a moment's pause, "what an attentive listener I had this morning."

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, reddening and nervously twisting and untwisting her fingers.

"You don't know," the clergyman went on in his slow, deliberate tones, "what pleasure it gives one to feel that one's words are not being lost—that listeners are repaying in attention the trouble their pastor is taking to instruct and enlighten them."

"I—I couldn't help listening," said Elisabeth in confusion. "I never heard anyone," she went on hurriedly, "say just such things as you did. They made me—they made me feel——"

"Well? Don't be afraid, my dear," said Mr. Holland, kindly. "Look on me as your pastor for the time being; you were one of my flock, you know, this morning. Perhaps," he went on, as Elisabeth did not speak, "they made you feel that you would like to be good, and that you find it rather hard work?" Elisabeth looked up gratefully. "Yes, yes; that is what we all find," he continued, leaning forward a little, spreading out his hands to the blaze. "We none of us find it easy to be good; to become so is the business of our lives, you know. But we each of us have our special difficulties; that is what you find, I dare say."

"Yes," said Elisabeth, turning away her head.

"Well, supposing we talk over these difficulties together, and see if nothing can be done to remove them. Not now, though," he said, as someone opened the door, looked in, and retreated; "we should be interrupted; besides, I must go and see Mr. Sparrow. We will find another opportunity; and, meanwhile, don't distress yourself, my dear; don't distress yourself." He rose as he spoke. Elisabeth rose also. "There is one thing more, my dear, I had to say to you," he continued, feeling in the deep pocket of his coat. "Ah, here it is." He took out the packet containing the necklace. "A circumstance," he said, "has come to my knowledge that has occasioned me real distress."

Elisabeth's eyes widened. She could not imagine what was coming. The clergyman perceived her alarm.

"There is nothing that need distress *you*, my dear young lady," he said, with increased kindness; "but it has come to my knowledge that, prompted, I fear—very needlessly prompted—by some words of mine, you parted with a necklace in order to settle that little money matter that lay between us. It was needless, my dear Miss Elisabeth; it was altogether needless."

"Oh, but I had rather—I wanted to——" said Elisabeth, with some incoherence. "I didn't mean you to know; I

can't think how you have found out—I could not bear for you to think me not honest."

"Well, well," said Mr. Holland, smiling, "and I could not bear, my dear, that you should be deprived of your necklace. It has come into my hands, you see. It gives me pleasure to restore it to its lawful owner."

He placed the packet in Elisabeth's hand. She gazed at him for a moment in blank astonishment.

"My necklace!" she said at last. She took off the paper wrapper: the necklace lay in its case. A sob rose choking in her throat; she had not known before what it was to be deprived of her mother's last gift. "How good—how good of you!" she said at last, raising her eyes to Mr. Holland's face. "Oh, you are so good, I don't know how to thank you! Only I oughtn't to take it, ought I? I shall owe you the money still."

"No, no; that is all settled," said Mr. Holland quickly. "It is all settled," he repeated, laying his hand kindly on the girl's shoulder; "and you will do me a favor by not alluding to the subject again. Keep your necklace, my dear, and take better care of it in the future."

He held out his hand with a kind smile, and passed out of the room as Mary Sparrow entered it.

"Mamma says—how odd you look, Elisabeth!" said Miss Sparrow, staring at her with round eyes. "You have been scorching your face at the stove. Mamma never lets me scorch my face. Mamma says, Elisabeth, she is going to read a sermon aloud in my room, and she hopes you will join us, as there is no service down-stairs this afternoon. Mamma says she fears you care very little for the privileges of the Sabbath, Elisabeth; but she hopes you will not think of wasting all these precious hours in mere frivolity. Please come at once, Elisabeth. I have been looking for you everywhere."

Somewhat to Miss Sparrow's surprise, Elisabeth followed her without a word of remonstrance. On their way up-stairs they passed Mr. Holland on his slow progress toward Mr. Sparrow's room; he was pausing half-way up with his hand on the banister to gain breath. An immense and gentle pity mingled itself with the reverence in Elisabeth's heart as she saw him. She paused a second, longing to offer him her arm; but diffidence held her back, and she passed on with Mary.

As for Mr Holland, he reached his brother clergyman's room not ill satisfied with his afternoon's work. He had

said no more to Elisabeth than he had had occasion to say a hundred times before in the exercise of his pastoral office ; long experience had made every flutter of her little inexperienced heart legible to him, so far, as an open book. Only that golden prize he had set on his horizon had vitiated the whole situation in giving it a new color.

But the horror of the situation so vitiated could never have been made apparent to him for a moment.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BARONESS MAKES A WEDDING PRESENT.

" My dear Emilia," Baroness von Leuwine wrote, some six weeks later—" What is this I hear ? The news is incredible —quite incredible. Unfortunately I believe it, I believe the earth goes round the sun, and that a young girl is the most incomprehensible of God's creatures. Yes, the most incomprehensible ; I repeat it to myself, to excuse in some degree my own extraordinary blindness and stupidity. Forgive myself I never shall. After all the experience I have had with dozens of girls, not to have had my eyes opened to the situation before I left Schlossberg ! It is a fact, my dear Emilia, that on the last, almost the last occasion that Elisabeth Verrinder sat to me, a day or two before I left your house, I saw her silly little head had let itself be turned by some foolish fancy : she had the air of walking above the clouds, in an atmosphere too fine for common use, that a girl assumes on such an occasion. My suspicions fixed themselves for a moment upon Gordon ; it never occurred to me—and how, after all, should it occur to me ?—that your brother had anything to say in the matter. Afterward that affair of the necklace drove it out of my head. But when I reflect that it was I who refrained from setting the whole transaction before her in its true light, for fear of destroying her illusions, I asked myself what, after all, is the use of being fifty-six years of age, and of having had twenty years' experience of the extraordinary capacity for folly in young girls ? But I have had my lesson. Never a girl among them but shall have her illusions destroyed without pity by me henceforward. As regards Elisabeth, it is now too late. To give her my real opinion of Robert Holland, now that

she has engaged herself to marry him, would be worse than useless; she would not believe me, and I should only alienate such affection for me as she has. I shall write to her, indeed: I shall say what I can—and I shall say it strongly—to put a stop to this preposterous marriage; but I must choose my ground with care. You, my dear Emilia, who are on the spot, can perhaps do and say more; you will oblige me greatly, my dear child, by using all your influence to prevent what, I own, appears to me horrible. Of what use is it to mince matters? Your brother, a middle-aged and broken-down man, has heard of Elisabeth's poor little fortune, and he has used the influence that anyone in a priestly guise so readily acquires over these young creatures to induce an inexperienced girl, hardly yet out of the school-room, to sacrifice herself as his wife. Now that the thing is done, I can see how it all came about as plainly as if I had arranged every step of the affair myself. The transaction, I repeat, is horrible. What a life lies before the poor child! You have the habit, I am aware, Emilia, of defending your half-brother. I have nothing to say against it; a certain amount of decent veiling drawn over the crudities of one's relations' faults is both seemly and convenient in the intercourse of life. But there are times, after all, when facts have to be faced. Your brother (apart from his ill-health, which will reduce his wife at once to the position of a *garde-malade*) has not a single quality calculated to render a young girl like Elisabeth Verrinder happy. He is narrow-minded; he is —forgive the word; it is not from your side of the family he inherits it—he is common-minded. The term is sufficiently comprehensive, I suppose; you know your brother, and I do not need to illustrate it. Elisabeth Verrinder is very childish for her years; anyone can see that at a glance; but it is simply because her aunt has insisted on treating her like a child of six years old. For she is of extreme intelligence; her tastes are both refined and intellectual—too intellectual for so young a girl; she has been thrown in upon herself, and needs an atmosphere of young and careless happiness in which to expand—and to end with, she is, poor child, an idealist, and of morbid sensibility. Imagine a nature such as this in constant contact with a man like Robert Holland. You will say that I exaggerate; I emphasize, perhaps. Elisabeth has faults, of course; more, probably, than I am aware of; your brother may have—indeed, doubtless has—virtues. Nevertheless, every

word I have written is true ; the main lines are correct in every particular. Should the marriage take place, one of two things, taking Elisabeth's youth into consideration, will happen : either—which Heaven forbid—her mind will narrow itself to fit his, or she will find herself in opposition to him on every important question in life. Either result will be disastrous.

"Has Gordon started ? I heard from him about a fortnight ago. He reported well of his father, and spoke of your kindness, my dear Emilia, in terms that show what he feels about it."

To this Madame von Waldorf made reply :

"It did not need your letter, dear Aunt Irma, to convince me of the extreme unsuitableness of the proposed marriage between my brother and Elisabeth Verrinder. The news of it was a shock to me. I did not, I could not pretend to congratulate him ; for though I venture to have a better opinion of him than you entertain, and though Miss Verrinder is less sympathetic to me than she is to you, still, the difference of age, Robert's ill-health, and the possibility that other people may attribute to him the fortune-hunting motive you mention, make the whole thing more distasteful to me than I can say. I was about to write to you last night when your letter came. You do not say from whom you heard the news. Possibly from Frau Werner, or perhaps even from Mrs. Sparrow ; one knows the chatter that goes on in those little bourgeois pensions ; it was very probably a matter of common talk before Robert himself came round to tell me of his engagement. You may not, however, have heard, since you do not mention it, that before proposing to Miss Verrinder my brother wrote for permission to do so to her uncle and aunt. I don't know whether this will make you think better of him ; I have given up trying to make you think better of Robert ! But, personally, I am gratified that he should have acted with so much propriety. Unfortunately —from your point of view and from mine—Colonel and Mrs. Verrinder, having made, I presume, the needful inquiries, offer no objection whatever to their niece's marriage. Mrs. Verrinder, I imagine, has no particular affection for Elisabeth, and is not sorry to be rid of her ; and her husband I further imagine to be a good natured and weak-headed man, a good deal ruled by his wife. This I gathered

in a conversation with Elisabeth, who seems to have a great affection for her uncle, but not to rely upon him in the least. She refers always to her aunt as the final ruler of her destinies. Her aunt, then, has given her consent, only making the stipulation. an odd one enough under the circumstances, that Elisabeth is to go through another six months' course of study here. I don't mean the stipulation is not sensible, but it is odd. Six months of society would have been more to the purpose, one would think. However, the marriage will not take place till the expiration of the six months, at any rate.

"I may tell you at once that I had forestalled your wish that I should speak to Elisabeth. I did, indeed, what you say your wise young Emilia (as you are pleased to call me) never does : I acted on impulse. I went to her immediately on hearing the news. I am not altogether blind, dear Aunt Irma ; it is perhaps because I see Robert's defects sufficiently plainly that I always feel impelled to defend him. He is my father's son, but it would be vain for me to pretend that he resembles my father. I will not say he has the faults of his mother's class, since, certainly, no class has a monopoly of either faults or virtues ; I will only say he has not inherited certain traditions. Elisabeth Verrinder's curious shyness has made it difficult for me to get on with her. She is afraid of me, I believe ; but it is easy to perceive she has great refinement of nature ; and I felt convinced, from what Robert said, that she was acting in one of those moments of blind infatuation that may entangle a young girl's entire life. As Robert's sister I felt a certain responsibility. It may be—yes, I fear it must be —her fortune, small as it is, that has attracted him. I know he has always felt strongly the inequality between his fortune and ours ; it has embittered our whole relations with him. But you may judge whether I found it a pleasant task to go and try to enlighten Elisabeth as to the defects of the man she is engaged to marry, and who happens to be my brother. If I had not acted on impulse, I might not have had the courage to act at all ; or perhaps, indeed, I might have acted with more discretion ; as it is, I feel disposed to regret it. I feel guilty of a want of generosity toward Robert ; and the interview, as might have been expected, had no result whatever. Elisabeth did not believe a word I said (I seem, to myself, to have said the most unpardonable things) ; I could only kiss her at the end as an apology for having made myself so dis-

agreeable. I think she will forgive me, for I doubt if my words made sufficient impression on her ever to come into her head again.

"Gordon has not yet started. Some delay has occurred through the action of a rich Mr. ——, I forget his name, but a rich Englishman, in short, who proposes to share with the society the expenses of the expedition, on condition of being allowed to join it. His preparations are not concluded, hence the present delay; but in a week or two Gordon will be leaving Schlossberg. He is alternately charming with me, and plunged in gloom. If you are writing to him, dear Aunt Irma, I wish you would induce him—persuade him to believe, not only that under the circumstances it is the most reasonable and natural thing in the world that my uncle should be with me, but that it also gives me the liveliest pleasure. It would reconcile one to growing old, if one could hope for an old age so beautiful and harmonious as his. He lives in your studio and the adjoining room, which have so changed their aspect you would not know them. Gordon has found an excellent attendant for him; he ought to be happy about it all. Persuade him to be happy. It is one of his faults —I often tell him so—that he is incapable of reasoning justly outside his own idea of things.

"Ida insists on sending three blots at the end of my letter by way of kisses. She has made them with the greatest care, and their blackness represents, I suppose, the depth of her affection.

"Your affectionate EMILIA."

The interview to which Madame von Waldorf alluded had taken place with no great result, certainly, so far as Elisabeth was concerned. It was in the afternoon of the day next but one following her engagement to Mr. Holland, and her immeasurable felicity was not yet forty-eight hours old. She had gone down to the salon to fetch a book, and was passing through the hall on her way upstairs again, when Mr. Holland, entering by the front door, overtook her; and drawing her with a smile, but without speaking, into Frau Werner's room, which happened to be empty, took from a little box in his pocket a gold engagement ring, and fitted it on her finger. It was one of those plain betrothal rings so common in Germany, formed by two hands that meet and clasp as an earnest of the unending bliss about to begin; and Elisabeth, looking on this

token of eternal union, found its symbolism so exquisite that no diamond, or pearl, or ruby, emblem of the riches of a lover's love, could have afforded her such large content. She looked down on it in silence for a moment, then raised her eyes to Mr. Holland's face. She did not smile or blush; the moment had a sacredness for her beyond such trivial signs of emotion; but her eyes gave a pledge that corresponded with the token on her hand. The next moment, with an abrupt movement, she brushed past the clergyman, and fled up the stairs to her own room.

She entered her room, that dusky refuge for the complex emotions of her life, and bolted the door behind her. A western sunbeam was slanting athwart the dusk, travelling up the long slope of the dimly papered walls. Elisabeth laid down her book, and went up to the window to look at her ring again by the clear light. She stood there for a long while, not thinking, rapt in an ecstasy too large and vague for thought. The far-extending plain, the vast over-spreading heaven, the infinite suggestions of the declining day, were all too narrow—they had seemed so wide before—for the sense of rapture that filled her heart. She did not care to think—no more than a spirit newly entered into Paradise might care at once to give itself up to studying the details of the scenery of its new abode.

A knock at the door startled her. "Come in," she cried; then, remembering that the door was bolted, she crossed the room to open it. It opened to admit Emilia von Waldorf.

Madame von Waldorf, on hearing that Elisabeth was at home, had debated a moment whether to ask for an interview in Frau Werner's little parlor, or to seek the girl in her room up-stairs; she decided on the latter, as leaving them less open to interruption. Emilia, as she subsequently wrote to the Baroness, was acting on impulse; and she was willing to let the impulse carry her where it would. It carried her now up six flights of stairs to Elisabeth's room; but she paused again at the door before knocking, feeling strangely, unaccountably nervous. She had not in the least decided what she was going to say; she only knew that her whole being was in revolt against her brother's proposed marriage; and revolt was so rare in Emilia's serene and tranquil nature that she hardly knew how to deal with it. She knocked at last; but when the door was opened she still hesitated a moment on the threshold. Elisabeth, dragged suddenly from heights of

empyrean blue, stood there blinking her eyes for a moment, looking a little dazed. Madame von Waldorf held out her hand.

"May I come in?" she said.

"Oh, please come in," said Elisabeth, shyly, drawing back that her visitor might enter. "I beg your pardon; I didn't know who it was at first." Madame von Waldorf, as Elisabeth was aware, had never before paid her a visit; and it came over her strangely—she had not thought of it before—that she would be placed in new and possibly intimate relations with this charming and gracious woman, with whom she had yet never been able to feel herself altogether at ease. Madame von Waldorf turned to her again.

"I feel as if I were an intruder," she said apologetically; "you would have preferred, perhaps, to see me downstairs. But I thought it probable that we might be quieter here."

"Oh, yes, thank you, it is very kind of you," said Elisabeth, confusedly. She crossed the room as she spoke, and drew forward an armchair set in the recess of the window. "Won't you sit down?" she said. "This is the best chair, I think; the chairs are not very nice."

"Thank you," said Emilia. She stood looking at the chair for a moment, as if she did not quite know what she was about; then sitting down, began to loosen the furs about her throat. The sunset, illuminating her face, showed it to be both serious and agitated; there was hardly a trace of the sweet and open smile that gave a varying charm to her countenance; she was nervous, in short, a nervousness that displayed itself in singular contrast with her usual unruffled demeanor.

"Miss Verrinder——" she began and stopped; she did not know what to say. She wanted to warn, to expostulate; that was the impulse that had brought her; but it was, she felt, the most difficult, the most invidious task she had ever set herself to accomplish. "I had a visit from my brother to-day," she said at last. "It will not, I dare say, surprise you to know that he talked a great deal about you."

"Oh, did he?" said Elisabeth, rather wistfully. It seemed to her probable that Mr. Holland had been apologizing to his sister for his choice of a wife so insignificant as herself. Madame von Waldorf looked at her with a feeling she had occasionally had before, that she did not altogether understand Elisabeth; she felt terribly embarrassed.

When she spoke again, her words, for the first time in her life, perhaps came with an abrupt awkwardness.

"Of course—he told me, of course," she said, "of your engagement. It took me by surprise, I own ; it distressed me——"

The blood rushed to Elisabeth's cheeks. "Oh!" she cried, turning away her head. Emilia divined her feeling this time in a moment, perceiving in the same moment how ill-chosen her own words had been. She recovered herself at once.

"Forgive me," she said with great sweetness, leaning forward, and taking Elisabeth's hands in hers. "I expressed myself badly ; it was not of my brother that I was thinking, it was of you. It is on your account, my dear child, that the news distressed me——" She hesitated again, then went on in a sort of hurry : "I feel strongly in the matter. You must forgive me if, in fact, I say anything to pain you, but you are a child as yet."

"I am not really a child," said Elisabeth, flushing a little with a dawning sense of defiance. "I am nearly eighteen."

"You are a child in experience," said Madame von Waldorf ; "it cannot be otherwise. At your age, and in your position, a young girl can know nothing of life. You are going to marry a man of whom you know but little——"

"Oh!" cried Elisabeth again, and disengaging her hands from Emilia's.

"Indeed, you know but little of my brother," said Emilia, with extreme and gentle earnestness. "A man twice your age, in broken health, of comparatively limited means, and uncertain prospects——"

"I like all that," said Elisabeth, with averted face.

"Yes, that is understood," said Madame von Waldorf, with difficulty. "You will think me, you must think me, very unnatural in saying all this," she went on in a moment. "Naturally, I ought to rejoice in my brother having gained a fresh and pure affection like your own. But I cannot, I cannot rid myself of a certain sense of responsibility. You were sent out here to finish your studies, and my brother has taken—advantage has been taken of your youth and inexperience to bind you with obligations where you ought to have been left altogether free."

She paused once more. Elisabeth, breathing a little quickly, but still with averted face, stood silent. In a moment Madame von Waldorf began again.

"Robert," she said, speaking as before with a certain difficulty—but Elisabeth's silence drew her on—"has doubtless many good, many excellent qualities. I believe him to be devout, earnest, and single-minded in his desire to influence others for good. But he has faults like every other man who ever lived. It is his excuse that he has had in some ways a hard life; he has resented his narrow fortunes; he thinks a good deal—a good deal about money, and——"

"No!" cried Elisabeth, with violence; "he does not! You mustn't say such things; he does not! He has no faults; if he had any, I should not want to hear about them. But I know him better than you do; he has none!"

She turned from Madame von Waldorf, and stood with her folded arms resting against the wall of the little recessed window, her face hidden against her arms. Emilia sat motionless, and a little pale for a moment; then rising, laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Elisabeth," she said, "I should like you to believe how greatly I desire that we should become friends."

"Not if you say such things as those," said Elisabeth, without moving.

"Well, I will not say them again," said Madame von Waldorf, after a moment's consideration. "In any case, it is useless, I feel." She felt it indeed; the part she had been playing was odious to her. Whatever happened, she could do no more; evidently, too, she had managed matters as badly as possible. "I will ask nothing of you now," she said, "but to believe that I shall welcome you as a sister." She touched the girl's hair gently. "You will believe that, Elisabeth, will you not?"

Elisabeth's arms slowly dropped to her side. There was not a particle of sullenness in her nature; and never did nature respond more instantly to the least word or act of kindness. The color rushed again to her cheeks as she turned her face to Emilia. The reaction to her usual shy reserve was instantaneous; already it seemed incredible to herself that she should have spoken to Madame von Waldorf with such a passion of violence; she felt herself horribly in the wrong. She did not speak, but with a shamed movement of contrition she put out her hand. Emilia took it in hers; she took her other hand also, and in doing so glanced down at the gold ring encircling the third finger. A look, undecipherable by Elisabeth, passed across her face,

"That," she said—"that is your betrothal ring?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, shyly.

Madame von Waldorf looked down again at the shabby little ring; then, with an impulse that she afterward told herself had been thrice ill-judged—poor Emilia, her whole proceedings, she declared to herself, had been lamentably ill-judged; she would never act on impulse again—she released Elisabeth's hands, and drawing off her glove, took from her finger a ring set with a single diamond of some value, that she wore with one or two others.

"Will you," she said, hesitating now a good deal, "do me the favor, Elisabeth, to accept this from me? A betrothal ring should have a guard, and yours, I see, is a little loose. This ring is of no value—none," she went on quickly, as Elisabeth drew back. "I don't care for it, I mean, as a personal memento, even. It came to me with a number of others. Its best value for me now would be that you should accept it. So, that is right," she said, slipping it on to Elisabeth's finger; "it shall be a pledge that we will only remember of this conversation that has passed, that we promised each other to be sisters."

She smiled very sweetly, and kissed the girl's cheek as she spoke. Elisabeth said hardly anything in answer; and, indeed, Madame von Waldorf instantly changed the conversation. "Tell me," she said, fastening her furs about her throat and drawing on her long glove again, "have you written to Madame von Leuwine?"

"Not yet," said Elisabeth, looking down and turning the rings on her finger. "I haven't had time."

"Ah, I dare say you have felt that you have had no time at all this day or two," said Emilia. "But you must write to Aunt Irma; it would vex her not to hear from you yourself. And I want you to come and dine early with Ida and me to-morrow. We must get to know each other better now than we have been able to do hitherto."

And it was after this second interview that Madame von Waldorf wrote to the Baroness.

It was after supper on this same evening, of which the events have been given in some detail, that Elisabeth was sitting in the salon with the rest of the pension party. She had felt shy about going in there; everyone had heard the news; everyone had congratulated her. It had been horrible, Elisabeth said to herself. But Mr. Holland arrested her at the foot of the stairs, as she was about to fly up to her own room as usual.

"Well," he said, "are you not coming into the salon?"

"Oh, would you like me to?" said Elisabeth, pausing instantly, her foot on the lower step.

"Well, what do you think?" he said, smiling at her; "I'm going to sit there myself, you know."

"Oh, I'll come!" said Elisabeth, growing scarlet; "but I'll fetch my work first, please. I won't be a minute." She flew up the stairs as she spoke. Elisabeth, who never touched a needle if she could help it, felt that she could not very well read to-night, and that her little piece of much tormented embroidery would be some sort of shield between herself and the small pension world. Even one of Mrs. Sparrow's mission blouses would have been thankfully accepted; but Mrs. Sparrow was now engaged in knitting comforters, and Elisabeth did not know how to knit.

Mr. Holland was not in the salon when she returned; he had been called away by his brother clergyman; and Elisabeth, after glancing round the room in search of him, threaded her way to a distant sofa, making herself small as she went, that she might not be caught and detained by Mrs. Sparrow. That worthy woman, however, was much too discreet to advance any claims on Elisabeth to-night; it was proper, of course, for a young girl in her position to be at liberty to devote herself to the man to whom she was engaged; Mrs. Sparrow had too much correct feeling to interfere with that. She had received the news of Elisabeth's engagement with emotions of a mingled complexion. She treated the girl with great kindness; indeed, she called her into her own room, embraced her, and addressed her for half an hour on the duties, the responsibilities, the vicissitudes of a clergyman's wife—a discourse enriched by many reminiscences from her own experience. Elisabeth sat dutifully patient, but with an attention that strayed. What connection could there be between this opening heaven toward which her soul was winging its flight and the dull and dusty path trodden by Mr. Sparrow's middle-aged wife? Mrs. Sparrow had even less success when she touched on the honors awaiting Elisabeth in her future position as wife of the vicar of Thornton Briars. So far, Elisabeth's future position had not engaged the girl's mind for a single moment; she and Mr. Holland might have had a future *à deux* before them in a wilderness upholstered with rocks, and with a couple of ravens to relieve them of sordid cares, for all the thought

she had given to the matter. The excellent seed Mrs. Sparrow was sowing fell on the most barren of soils. Not the less was she touched by her friend's kindness; and when that good lady embraced her at the end of her homily, Elisabeth threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her and thanked her with all her heart. Mrs. Sparrow shook her head, however, as the girl left the room. If—the thought necessarily passed through her mind—if a beneficed clergyman *had* come to a German pension to find a young wife, how much more suitable was her own Mary, with her sound principles and steady, discreet ways, than the heedless Elisabeth! How was it possible, Mrs. Sparrow demanded of the unseen and apparently uninstructed fates, that a girl who could not even remember to change her wet shoes and stockings when she came in out of the rain should be fit to take the entire charge of a parish? Now Mary, under her mother's training, would fill the office to admiration. Mrs. Sparrow had a brief vision of herself ruling at Thornton Briars, ploughing up that neglected spot, guiding with her counsels of perfection daughter and son-in-law and parish. But the vision passed instantly, as she began to darn a pair of her husband's socks. Such things were not for her, as she had known long enough, nor apparently for her daughter either. She had not three hundred a year of her own; and no one in the world knew better than poor Mrs. Sparrow the exact value of three hundred a year. It only lay within human nature, however, that she could snub the divinity student a little that evening. It is true that that young man had several exasperating ways. He invariably yawned three times running, five minutes after Mrs. Sparrow began the reading aloud with which she had the habit of improving the evening; and when the inevitable moment arrived when she was obliged to pause and remove her attention from her book to her knitting, he as invariably slipped away as quietly as if he had melted into air. A youthful and sympathetic titter, into which even the sage Mary was once betrayed by this manœuvre, drew down upon her more wrath than had ever descended on her head before. Certainly there was a moving difference between the dignity of Elisabeth's position and that of her daughter's relations with a pale and snub-nosed student. Happily, Mary seemed to find the difference all in her own favor; she never betrayed the least desire to marry Mr. Holland.

Elisabeth, then, made her way unchallenged to a sofa in

a deserted corner of the room; deserted because it was lighted by a single candle only, set on a small table where the little governess sat correcting her exercises as usual. Elisabeth sat down, and began plying her needle, breaking her cotton and unpicking her wrong stitches by the dim light. She was glad that she was not expected to join Mrs. Sparrow at the centre-table, but she wished Mr. Holland would come. She did not want to talk to people, yet she felt as if everyone were staring at her; Miss Robbins' furtive and sympathetic eye, for instance, was constantly upon her, she knew. An engaged young woman was, in fact, an object of the liveliest interest to Miss Robbins. She had never been quite so closely in contact with one before, and she brought to her contemplation the most cheerful curiosity. Something new and entertaining in connection with her might certainly be expected at any moment—that was only due to the spectators. Presently Mr. Holland did appear, with a newspaper in his hand; and, crossing the room with his slow, dragging step, seated himself on the sofa beside Elisabeth, and began to read. He did not speak; he hardly even looked at her. But instantly a great and satisfying sense of happiness and protection filled the poor child's heart. She forgot everyone else in the room; they might stare if they pleased; she had become absolutely unconscious of their gaze. The little governess got up, and with a friendly nod wished her good-night. Elisabeth did not even see her. She still plied her needle, but her stitches were set even more at random than before, and she forgot to unpick them. Presently Mr. Holland laid down his newspaper, fixed his gaze for a moment absently on the room before him, then turned to her, leaning a little across the sofa to investigate her work.

"Well," he said, "and what are you so busy about?"

"Oh, nothing," said Elisabeth, crumpling up the work in her hand. She was always so ashamed of her bad embroidery. In a moment, however, she remembered herself, and spread it out for his inspection.

"It's nothing," she said; "I do this sort of work so badly. I don't like work."

"Well, that's rather a pity, isn't it?" said Mr. Holland. "Work seems to me a very useful employment for young ladies—teaches them to keep their things in order, and so on."

"Oh, I can do that," said Elisabeth, unfolding her ac-

complishments with modest pride; "I learnt all that at school; and I made a dress for myself, too, once. It didn't fit very well, though," she added, ingenuously.

"Ah, well, that is very useful—very useful indeed," said the clergyman; "all young women, whatever their station in life, should know how to do that sort of thing. It always comes in usefully, I fancy. And this seems to me very nice, too," he added, taking up the umbroidery and examining it with undiscerning eyes. "Not quite so fresh-looking as it might be, perhaps—been on hand a good while, eh?"

"Oh, yes. Please, may I have it?" said Elisabeth, holding out her hand to take it from him. As she did so his eye fell on the diamond ring set on her third finger above his own gift.

"Where did you get that?" he said, detaining her hand for a moment to examine it. "I thought you told me you had no rings." (Elisabeth had, in fact, imparted to him that piece of information.) "Where can you have got one of so much value?"

"It was your sis--Madame von Waldorf gave it to me," said Elisabeth. "I should have told you about it; I meant to; but I haven't seen you since."

"My sister--Emilia, do you mean?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, slightly intimidated by his tone; "she came to see me this afternoon. She was very kind; she said she would like me to wear it on this finger as a guard."

Mr. Holland was silent for a moment. "That was meant as an impertinence!" he said then, in a distinct voice.

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, startled, and letting her work fall to the ground.

"It was meant as an impertinence--it is an impertinence," said Mr. Holland, with deliberation. "You will oblige me, Elisabeth, by never letting me see that ring again, and by returning it to my sister at the earliest opportunity."

"Oh, oughtn't I to have taken it?" said Elisabeth, in the greatest consternation, slipping the ring from her finger into her pocket.

"I don't blame *you*, my dear—it was impossible you should understand; you have not the experience requisite for the comprehension of impertinence of a certain order. But you will oblige me by returning the ring without delay."

He rose as he spoke, folded up his newspaper, and slowly left the room. Elisabeth sat transfixed for a minute by dismay; something more dreadful than she could have imagined had happened. She could not think what had happened! And yet directly afterward her strongest feeling was that it would be impossible for her to return the ring to Madame von Waldorf. Emilia's words—she had been right in that supposition—in so far as they concerned her brother, had made hardly any impression on Elisabeth beyond the momentary passion they had roused; they had already almost passed from her mind. But she remembered very distinctly, with the ardent gratitude that kindness always roused in her, Madame von Waldorf's voice, the charming look in her beautiful eyes as she put the ring on her finger, and said they would be friends and sisters; she could not—she could not be so ungrateful as to give it back. In a moment she sprang from her seat, picked up her working materials, and cramming them into her pocket, ran out into the hall. Mr. Holland was just gathering up his strength to mount the stairs, when he heard Elisabeth's voice behind him.

"Mr. Holland!" she said.

He turned round and faced her. "Well?"

"Mr. Holland," said Elisabeth, "do you—would you mind if I don't return the ring to Madame von Waldorf? I won't wear it, indeed," she went on hurriedly; "you shall never see it again, if only I may keep it and not send it back. She couldn't have meant—not what you said. She looked so kind when she gave it to me; she said she wanted us to be sis—sisters."

Mr. Holland had been engaged not three days, and he was made of flesh and blood, as most of us are. He looked down on Elisabeth, on her tearful eyes and quivering lips, and relented. "Well," he said, smiling and taking both her hands in his. "Keep the ring, my dear," he said; "but don't let me see it again; I know my sister better than you do. And besides," he added, with a flight of frigid sentiment, smiling again as he raised her left hand and contemplated the symbol of eternal union he had left there, "I want to feel that this little hand is entirely my own."

He drew her toward him, placed a paternal kiss on her forehead, and ascended the stairs, leaving Elisabeth overwhelmed by his goodness and condescension.

She never wore the ring again. Whether Madame von

Waldorf noticed its absence, she did not know ; for Emilia never mentioned it.

Elisabeth, who dreaded congratulations—these mundane congratulations seemed to her singularly irrelevant to the transcendent bliss of her opening Paradise—had one more such ordeal to endure within the next few days. She had been dining again with Madame von Waldorf, who, in view of their approaching connection, had wished, as she said, that they should become friends. Friends they were, in the sense of mutual kindness of feeling ; but they made no approach to any great intimacy. The young girl and the young woman had too little in common. Elisabeth, with her inward glow of passion, her brooding fires of enthusiasm, iced over by a shy reserve that she was so far almost helpless to break through, lay a little outside Madame von Waldorf's comprehension and sympathies. Still, she was very kind to the young girl ; and Elisabeth, responding with a great deal of gratitude and admiration, had already begun to feel less constrained and ill at ease than at first. On the day in question, after dining with Madame von Waldorf, she had strayed into the garden to gather some snowdrops from a winter-blossoming border against a southern wall. It was past the New Year, but the days had hardly yet begun to lengthen. Already the sun shone low and red behind the leafless screen of poplars, across the brown parterres and damp garden walks, the deserted stone benches and wintry statues. At the central pool Elisabeth paused a moment ; a space of blue sky seemed fallen there at her feet from the crystalline blue of the winter sky overhead ; Ida's gold-fish were safe indoors ; the little pool lay clear through its depth, quivering a little as though with a shiver at its heart, before the frost-touch of night should come to fix it with a thin film of ice. Elisabeth stood motionless, gazing down at this blue fragment of heaven, caught in a cup, so it seemed, in the midst of the wintry earth, filled at the same source as that of the happiness that lay deep and pure at her heart. She was feeling happy to-day, indeed. That morning she had excused herself from attendance at her class (that ardor for study and occult information that had possessed her had somewhat cooled in these last days) ; Mr. Holland was feeling more fatigued than usual, and she had permitted herself—with his permission—to devote herself to his comfort in Frau Werner's little sitting-room, abandoned by that good woman to their use. She had hunted through

the house for a footstool that would suit him ; she had brought down a cushion from her own little sofa up-stairs ; he had allowed her to read to him. Mr. Holland was no great reader ; but it pleased him sometimes to hear the newspapers or some unexciting story read aloud ; and he had praised, whilst correcting, her voice and elocution. Afterward they had talked ; and Elisabeth, won from her usual reticence, had told him all about herself—her early life, her lonely childhood, about her school-days, too, already so remote, so alien from her present existence. That exquisite pleasure of self-revelation, known in its fulness only to those solitary and diffident natures who permit themselves for once to believe in the full and unwearying sympathy of a hearer, filled Elisabeth's heart with joy. And the joy was to be recurrent, it was to last all her life ; never again would she shed lonely tears, and feel that the world was a hard place for a little girl of seventeen, wandering bewildered, without a clew, in the midst of the sad bruising problems of existence. All that was at an end now. No wonder Elisabeth felt happy. Only one thing had disconcerted her morning of perfect felicity. When she had told Mr. Holland of her engagement to dine with Madame von Waldorf, he had betrayed a certain vexation. In a moment, however, he relented with a "Well, well," seeing Elisabeth's look of dismay at his annoyance.

"Only don't forget your afternoon class, my dear," he said ; "we have been idle this morning ; but your aunt is right in wishing you to pursue your studies for the present. Later on, you will have other and more important duties to occupy your attention. And it is for that reason," he continued, after a moment's consideration, "that it will, perhaps, be well for you, Elisabeth, not to frequent my sister's house more than is necessary during the winter. Every civility I should wish shown to her, of course ; but the life of idleness and luxury that almost necessarily follows on the possession of great wealth is not one that will ever lie within your reach, or that can be a very wholesome example to you in any way."

"Oh, I don't care, I don't care," said Elisabeth, "I mean that Madame von Waldorf is very kind indeed, but I don't so much care about going there since the Baroness has gone to Vienna."

"Ah, the Baroness," said Mr. Holland, smoothing down his mustache with one finger. "Well, well," he con-

cluded, with an indulgent smile, "go, or you will be late." And Elisabeth went.

An idle and luxurious life lay so entirely outside the range of my heroine's aspirations and wishes, that it may be affirmed with certainty that that part of Mr. Holland's speech did not once recur to her. It recurred to her so little that she did not even enter a mental protest against it, as her sense of justice might have persuaded her to do on a moment's reflection. No; her happiness, I say, lay pure and unruffled at her heart, as the little heaven-fallen fragment of blue at her feet, that she stood gazing down into now, lost in vague and entrancing thought. Only the chiming of a church clock roused her; her class began at four, and she must not be late. She wrapped her cloak closer around her, and hastened back toward the house.

At the foot of the steps leading up to the terrace she met Gordon Temple, who had entered the garden by a side door opening into a lane that ran down to the river. Elisabeth, on seeing him, stopped short with one of her abrupt shy movements. He, on his side, felt something of surprise at a change he discovered in the girl's face since he last met her, at the sort of radiance it showed under the shadowing brim of her gray felt hat; a fresh and charming maiden, so it seemed to him, stood there blushing before him, instead of the pale little schoolgirl he had seen coming and going now and again. He held out his hand with a great deal of cordiality, but with something more of deference also than he had yet felt in greeting her; until now she had seemed to him hardly less of a child than little Ida. He glanced at her once or twice as they ascended the steps together; after a moment of hesitation, he spoke.

"I am glad to have met you again, Miss Verrinder," he said. "I am leaving Schlossberg so soon that I am glad to have the chance of giving you all the good wishes that have been awaiting your acceptance for some days past."

"Oh, thank you," said Elisabeth, and instantly began to pull her flowers to pieces.

"It gives me a great deal of pleasure," Gordon continued, "to think that we shall be so nearly related." "That was a lie," he remarked afterwards to his cousin. "You will excuse my saying so, Emilia, but I think this marriage atrocious. What business has a sick man like Robert to go and marry a charming young girl? It ought to be pre-

vented." This view of the matter, however, he did not propound to Elisabeth, who merely looked at him in a somewhat startled fashion. She was vaguely aware that Gordon Temple was Mr. Holland's cousin, but she had not realized the future connection between herself and this remote young man ; she had not, in fact, thought about him at all.

"We shall be related?" she said.

"Why, yes," said Gordon, rather taken aback, but unable to help laughing, "if what I have heard is true, that is to say. Perhaps I'm making some dreadful mistake."

"Oh, no, it is true," said Elisabeth, in a great hurry. "Are you going to leave Schlossberg at once?" she went on quickly.

"The day after to-morrow." He walked on in silence for a minute at her side, his hands thrust into his pockets. "Miss Verrinder," he said then, standing still, "this news —this true news," he said, smiling at her, "emboldens me to make a request. You remain at Schlossberg, I think, for the present?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, without embarrassment, "until my classes are finished." Gordon looked at her ; she was not much more than a child, after all. This rather odd arrangement seemed to her the most natural thing in the world.

"Well, I am glad of that," he said, "because I wanted to ask you whether you would occasionally come in and see my father? It would give him so much pleasure if you would. He likes visitors—young visitors especially," he said with a smile ; "he and Ida are the best friends in the world."

"Oh, I shall be very glad to come," said Elisabeth. "I have seen your father. I should like to come very much, if you think he would care to have me. But I am afraid he will find me—I mean, he will think me stupid, I am afraid."

"Not at all!" cried her companion. "How can you say such things of yourself! It will give my father great pleasure to see you, Miss Verrinder. I venture to say that when you know him it will give you great pleasure also. You are fond of reading, I think? Well, so is he ; he can talk about all the books in the world ; and if you will tell him about different things you are doing and seeing, about life at the pension, and so on, that will please him also. Anything fresh from the outer world is always a great boon to him. I am not asking too much, am I?"

"Oh, no," said Elisabeth; "I shall like it—I mean, I will try to amuse him."

"Ah, that is just what I want," said Gordon. "I am always rather afraid, you know, of his being dull; an old man who cannot move about, and who is a good deal cut off by circumstances from the interests and friendships of a life-time, is in need of some distraction." He looked at her kindly. "He will like to know you," he said. "He has heard about you, as well as seen you once or twice. He is very much interested in his new niece."

"His new niece?" said Elisabeth.

Gordon laughed again. "You know, don't you," he said, "that my cousin Robert is my first cousin? that my mother was his father's sister?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Elisabeth, very much abashed. "I ought to know, of course. Yes, I suppose I did know. But Mr. Holland has—has never talked about his relations at all, and I never thought about it—except about Madame von Waldorf, of course."

"Ah, well, you will find us all very nice," said the young man, opening the window for her to enter and following her into the salon. "Well, then, you will come and see my father; that will be very good of you," he concluded, as Elisabeth stood with her hand half held out, wanting to go, but embarrassed about taking the initiative. Gordon saw her hesitation, and relieved it by holding out his own hand.

"Good-by," he said, "for I don't suppose we shall meet again before I start. By the by," he went on, not very relevantly, "have you heard lately from Madame von Leuwine?"

"Not very lately," said Elisabeth, coloring. "I ought to write to her."

"Ah, do," he said; "she is a good friend—a friend worth having. She forgets no one she has once cared about; she is goodness itself."

It was on Emilia's return to the salon that Gordon Temple made the remark quoted above. "I don't altogether understand your young lady, however," he continued; "she's shy, of course, one sees that; but she seems to have no more notion of things than if she had been brought up on a desert island. I like her, you know, I like her; but I don't understand her; after all, a girl of eighteen is not a baby.

"Oh, Elisabeth is not a baby——far from it," said Ma-

dame von Waldorf ; " but if you want her interpreted, Gordon, you should apply to Aunt Irma. She professes, you know, to read off a young girl's heart like an open book."

"No," he said, "I don't know that I want her interpreted ; I rather like her as she is ; I like the desert island flavor." He gave a laugh. "She had never heard of us," he said ; "I had to explain who we all are."

"Never heard of us?" said Madame von Waldorf, bewildered.

"Never heard of us as connected with Robert Holland, apparently—excepting you, of course. I had to go through the family tree, and represent to her what a delightful family she is coming into. I didn't mention Otto, by the by ; I don't suppose she ever did hear of him."

"Oh, that is Robert," said Madame von Waldorf with vexation ; "you know what he is ; he would never speak to one of us again, I believe, if he could help it. It is natural, perhaps—I mean one understands that he may resent certain differences for which neither he nor we are responsible ; but I would so willingly be friends with him, if he would meet me with the slightest cordiality. But he will not."

"Well, I like it," repeated Gordon ; "I mean that I like it in Miss Verrinder. Most young ladies in her position, engaged to marry a middle-aged parson, who is nothing particular in himself, would have had his family at their finger-ends by this time ; but it seems never to have occurred to her for a moment to think about it at all."

"That is easily explained," said Emilia, smiling a little. "She is madly in love with Robert, poor child. I don't suppose she thinks of another thing."

"Well, that I don't understand," said Gordon. He sat contemplating the ground for a minute in silence. "No, not even a desert island," he said, "could explain to me a young girl's being madly in love with Robert. Only the Baroness could interpret such a riddle as that. However, as Miss Elisabeth is going to marry him, I suppose it is only common charity to account for it in that way ; but God knows how long it will last after they are married." He was again silent for a minute. "I think the marriage an atrocious one," he repeated ; "I maintain that it ought to be prevented."

"My dear Gordon, who is to prevent it? Her own friends make no objection ; she herself has set her heart on it ; it is no one else's concern. Aunt Irma and I have

said what we could to dissuade her—of course it was turning the world topsy-turvy that we should speak to her about it in that sense at all ; but we did. And there is no one else to do anything—unless you take it in hand," she said, smiling.

"I ? What have I to do with it ?" he answered ; "it is obviously no concern of mine." And with that he began to talk of other things.

Elisabeth, who thought of nothing but Mr. Holland, had omitted to think of him when she pledged herself to go and see his uncle. She might, in fact, have found it difficult to keep her promise, which it was impossible to fulfil without going to Madame von Waldorf's house, but that Mr. Holland, not long afterwards, found himself compelled to leave Schlossberg for a season. The German winter was proving itself too severe for him ; he was ordered by the doctors to try the milder climate of Montreux till the later spring warmth should set in. It does not concern us to enlarge upon Elisabeth's sentiments at this separation ; it may suffice to say that she presently found consolation in the unlimited number of letters that Mr. Holland had given her permission to bestow upon him. He had requested her, and she had considered the request the most reasonable in the world, not to expect an equal number in reply ; she would hardly have dreamed of complaining, though she would have found it dull, had he sent no reply at all. Mr. Holland had too decorous a mind, however, to treat his correspondence with such large neglect ; and once a week, at least, Elisabeth received a priceless treasure in return for the daily volumes she herself thrust with beating heart into the letter-box on her way to and from her classes. Volumes indeed ; speech was so difficult to her, and writing, comparatively speaking, so easy ; and she could so completely figure to herself the singular attention Mr. Holland would bring to the study of these revelations of the personality that must certainly be more interesting to him than all the world beside. It is true Elisabeth's humility instructed her that her personality was too insignificant to be of any real importance to Mr. Holland ; but the two sentiments were not in the slightest degree incompatible ! On the whole, these may be counted among the happiest days she ever knew.

Mr. Holland, meanwhile, was not her only correspondent. She received more than one letter from the

Baroness in the course of the next few months. The first, but the first only, was one of earnest expostulation from her good friend. The Baroness entreated her to pause, to reflect, to consider how young she was, how ignorant of the world; to delay for a year or two, at any rate, before finally casting her fate for life; but after that letter Madame von Leuwine expostulated no more. Elisabeth's answer proved to her it would be useless; for the rest, the only relations the girl had in the world had consented to the marriage—the Baroness, though she never revealed the fact to Elisabeth, wrote, but without effect, to Mrs. Verrinder also; Mr. Holland, that lady replied, was of good family she understood, and held in the highest estimation—what could anyone else do? The Baroness, at any rate, wrote no more expostulations; she contented herself with making a bid, as it were, for Elisabeth's confidence and affection. She herself had conceived a warm affection for the young girl. Among the many young girls with whom she came in contact, she had found, as she considered, a "schöne Seele;" she had no intention, if she could help it, of losing sight of her, of letting her drift away into that void of life in which so many friendships are swallowed up, so many affections wither and perish. For the Baroness had the incomparable gift of a loyal and faithful soul—the best gift, one is sometimes tempted to think, that nature can bestow among the egotisms, the caprices, the great indifference of humanity.

The last letter she addressed to Elisabeth before her marriage was received by the girl on the eve of her marriage-day. She read it, as she had read all the others, in her spacious attic in the Pension Werner. For Elisabeth was to be married at Schlossberg. At the time of her engagement, she supposed, so far as she had considered the matter at all, that she would return to London and be married from her uncle's house. Such, in fact, would in ordinary circumstances probably have been the course of events. But some two or three months later, a letter from her aunt instructed her that Colonel Verrinder's health demanded a complete change; that she was, therefore, breaking up her establishment, and that they were going abroad for a twelvemonth. "Under these circumstances, my dear Elisabeth," Mrs. Verrinder had written, "I am particularly pleased to think that you have before you a settled and, as I trust, a happy future. Your Uncle's

health demands my incessant attention; I should be unable to give you any direct supervision; and the wandering life we may probably be compelled to lead for a time is one in every way unsuited to a young girl like yourself. Your marriage rejoices me, therefore, under every aspect. Young as you are, you are quite old enough at eighteen to undertake the superintendence of a household; and your uncle and myself are happy to think that you will be in the care of so excellent and estimable a man as we understand Mr. Holland to be. Some German baths having been recommended to your uncle during the summer, we shall take Schlossberg on our way, so as to be present at your marriage; which under the circumstances it will be best, as I have intimated to Frau Werner, should take place from her house. I have also, my good friend Baroness von Leuwine being in Vienna (a fact I regret on every account), forwarded a sum of money to Frau Werner, with the request that she will see to the purchase of such articles of clothing as you may require. Germans, I understand, are exceedingly practical in such matters, and I have every confidence in her judgment——"

"My judgment? I have an excellent judgment as to how many pounds of sausage thirty people will eat in a week," said poor Frau Werner, when my heroine communicated to her this letter; "far too many for my poor accounts to make much of a figure on the right side. I think sometimes it is my poor little Mina's and Lina's boots and shoes that I see the Reverend Sparrow swallowing down. He has such an admirable appetite, that good man. But as for your clothes, my best Fräulein, what do I know of them, or what time have I to think of them? Your aunt has some original ideas, I think. I am flattered by her confidence—pray tell her so when you write; but I shall have to request you, my dear Miss Elisabeth, to apply to someone else for advice; though you yourself, I should have thought, would best know what you require and what you would like. But if you should be in want of counsel, I would suggest Madame von Waldorf, a person of the finest taste and judgment in such matters. I shall so gladly hand over to her the money." And it was Emilia, finally, who superintended the purchase of Elisabeth's modest trousseau.

But to Elisabeth's immense, unspeakable relief, Mrs. Verrinder was not to be present at her marriage, after all.

Her aunt's arrival had hung before the girl like a nightmare ; and when a week before the appointed day she received a letter to say that Colonel Verrinder was laid up at Geneva with one of his worst attacks of rheumatic gout, that it would be impossible, therefore, for either of them to be present, she felt as if a cloud heavy as lead had been lifted from her life. Her aunt's presence had created for her always an atmosphere of dreariness and constraint. Only at Schlossberg had she been altogether free from it ; Schlossberg lay apart and sacred from that chill breath that had checked and silenced the fresh impulses of her youth ; she had felt that her aunt's presence would desecrate that separate spot also, would strew it with the gray ashes that seemed to lie upon all her previous years. Hardly could Mr. Holland have protected her ; the flower of her young life had been too closely pressed and flattened, to the intimate loss of color and fragrance, ever to spring freely within reach of that blighting influence. Other people, then, might be horrified at the isolation in which she was left ; that was not Elisabeth's point of view at all. She willingly abandoned to her friends any indignation that might be felt at the fact that not a relation of her own would be with her at her marriage ; and in none of them was the sentiment stronger than in Madame von Leuwine.

"My dear Elisabeth," she wrote in that letter received on the eve of Elisabeth's wedding-day, "I have been doing my utmost—my utmost so to arrange matters as to be in Schlossberg on Thursday ; but I find it absolutely impossible for the moment to quit Vienna. I am detained by business that demands my constant attention, so I can only leave you to Emilia's care. And for that matter I leave you to Emilia with an easy mind ; she will be to you, I know, as much a sister as is possible under the circumstances ; it is for my own pleasure, dear child, I should have liked to be with you.

"Emilia will give you a little gold bracelet I shall ask you to wear in memory of an old friend who loves you warmly ; but my real wedding present—you will think it a dull one, I am afraid—is contained in an enclosure in this letter. In the enclosed envelope, my dear Elisabeth, is a small sum of money which I request you to lock away, saying nothing of it to anyone, not even to your husband. Consider it my whim, and gratify it, my dear child ; and gratify me further by not opening the envelope or using

the money till some really urgent occasion shall arise—so urgent that you cannot get on without it. You cannot imagine it just now, but the moment may come when you may be glad to have a little money in reserve. In any case, it will give me so much pleasure that you should indulge me in my whim, that you will not, I am sure, refuse me. If in fifteen years, let us say, the money is still unspent, you shall return it to me; and I will expend it on whatever you shall choose."

Certainly Elisabeth could not imagine that perilous contingency hinted at by the Baroness; she could imagine it so little that she could not think what Madame von Leuwine meant by making her a present in such a form. Perhaps—it all at once occurred to her—it was because she had sold her necklace; but that was a memory that always made her cheeks burn, and she put it quickly out of her mind. On the whole, it certainly *was* a little dull; and she would very much have liked to know what was inside the envelope. She never dreamed, however, of not doing what her friend wished. She locked the money safely away in a box where she kept a few treasures, and sitting down, wrote at once to thank the Baroness and to give her the required promises. Then she dismissed the matter altogether from her thoughts; she had given her promise, and that was enough; there was no fear that she would be tempted to break it.

It was rather late by the time she finished her letter, and the house was quite quiet. Elisabeth was behindhand with her packing; and having, in an extreme desire to find herself alone, declined both Frau Werner's and Mrs. Sparrow's offers of assistance, she had to set to work and finish it now. She had felt no disposition to go to bed; but by the time everything was in readiness for the morrow, she was too tired to think of doing anything else. She collected some last stray scraps of paper and string, and put out her candle; the moon was shining so brightly into her room that she wished to have the pleasure of undressing by its light. It was June now; the little casement stood wide open to the warm summer air. It was not dark at all; the sky was a clear blue, the white moonlight lay everywhere, over the city and the plain; here and there a weathercock glittered on some tower or spire; the hills lay clear and soft like shadows on the horizon. It was so still, so peaceful over the sleeping city, that Elisabeth, leaning forward with her arms resting on the window-sill,

felt a strange oppression at her heart. She was not thinking then of the morrow, or of Mr. Holland; her mind shrank back, suddenly frightened, from that thought. She was thinking of the little lost brother whose name always filled her eyes with unbidden tears, of the mother gone from her when she was but five years old. If they could come to her now, come to her through the blue air, through the white glow and glory of the night, and bear her away with them, free, and yet for ever at peace—would not that be best? A terrible yearning suddenly filled the girl's heart after her childhood, after the past, after those faces whose dear memories filled the fresh morning of her life. The future said nothing to her then; what had it to do with those first half-mystic, childish days, with the mother on whose knee she had spelt out her first book, with the brother with whom she had played and quarrelled, and kissed and quarrelled again? What had it to do with her late years, with her books, her dreams, with the winged fancies that bore her through the magic, unknown, untried world, untried still, though it lay spread out there at her feet? The future returned upon her like a thunder-clap, a warning, a terror out of the silence of the light-transfused sky. The girl sank upon her knees, and broke into sobs and tears and inarticulate prayers. Oh, she was alone, too terribly alone for so young a thing.

Her tears passed. Perhaps she slept as she knelt there, leaning against the window-sill; for when she looked up again the moon had climbed above the house, and only the light from the sky was in her room. Elisabeth sprang up, startled; and lighting her candle again, began to hurry into bed. The homely familiar room brought back her familiar mood. The past rolled itself up and vanished; a sense of profound happiness filled her heart once more. What besides happiness could she henceforward know? Utterly to lose her faltering self in a better, wiser will than her own, that was the perfect future that lay before her. Elisabeth never conceived herself as developing an individuality apart from that of the man whom she had elected for worship; on the contrary, she dreamed of limiting her nature and her will to his, as under other circumstances she might have dreamed of limiting her nature to the still routine, the narrow walls of a convent cell.

Dreaming still, Elisabeth lay with open eyes far into the depth of that summer night. Presently, however, she slept.

CHAPTER XXI.

THREE LETTERS.

One April day, nearly three years later, Gordon Temple, arriving in London from the East, found among a pile of letters awaiting him at his hotel, two or three that more immediately concern the actors in this little history. The first that he opened was from the Baroness:

"If I have not written to you, my dear Gordon, since we wished each other good-by more than a twelvemonth ago, I am certainly not to blame. Qui s'excuse, s'accuse; I don't excuse myself, therefore; I merely state the fact that I have a great deal too much to do and to think of, to send letters wandering after vague addresses, with a hundred chances against their ever reaching the person to whom they are written. Your fifty addresses seemed to me each one more impossible than the other; so I waited until there was some moderate hope of my letter finding you in London. For the rest, Emilia, who is more enterprising than I am, and who has certainly less to do, will have kept you informed, I know, as to your father. I saw him only last week, on an occasion of a visit to Schlossberg. He was wonderfully well, not a day older in appearance than when you parted from him last spring. Such a beautiful old age ought, one would say, to last for ever; nevertheless, I am glad this second expedition of yours is at an end. He misses you, of course; and wherever you may be in Europe, you will at least be within a measurable distance of him; and at his age that is to be desired both for him and for yourself.

"I have to congratulate you, I find on various excellent things: on the success of your mission, on the distinguished name of which all your friends are beginning to be proud, on the recovery of part of your fortune. The first two are no more than I expected; the last, in spite of some probabilities, I did not greatly expect, and I am pleased I may say, in proportion. It is all very well to be a philosopher, and to say that money is of no account; once in a million years or so, perhaps, one may meet with a man to whom such words are literally true; but for the mass of struggling humanity, among whom I count you and myself, my dear Gordon, money is a delightful thing; and I,

for my part should find it very hard work in these days to get on without it. I am rejoiced to think your troubles in that direction are fairly over. I should like, however, to give you one word of exhortation about your father. Let me beg of you not to disturb him in his present quarters in Emilia's house. I do not speak only on his account. though that, naturally, must weigh with you more than anything else ; but also on Emilia's. My poor girl makes the best of her life, and indeed, it is a life of which a good deal may be made ; but after all, it is a broken one, and lonely enough in some ways ; and it has, I know, been the greatest pleasure and interest to her to have her uncle with her in these last years. I say all this because it seems to me probable that now you have a few hundreds again lying at your banker's, your first unwise idea may be to make your father independent of anyone's care but your own. I tell you frankly, then, without circumlocution, you are not nearly so well fitted to take care of him as some other people ; and that any attempt to carry out such an idea would simply create a great deal of unhappiness all round. As for my studio, concerning which you were pleased to make such a fuss last year, I found an excellent one last winter, so much better in various ways than the one I occupied in Emilia's house, that I should, in any case, retain it for myself in the future.

"If you have a day to spare from London before starting for Schlossberg, I wish you would look up your cousin, Robert Holland, and his wife. They have been spending the winter in the South of England, but they are at home again now in Thornton Briars, for how long I do not know, since I imagine his state of health to be such as to incapacitate him almost entirely for parish work. Do me the favor to go and see them, and send me a report. Their station is not above two hours by rail from London ; and though their village is ten miles from any station, that is no great matter for a traveller like yourself. I have not seen that poor child for more than two years and a half, and her letters give me little beyond the scantiest outlines of her life. When I say 'that poor child,' I do not mean that any particular misfortune has befallen her, but simply that I am convinced that her life is not a happy one ; how could it be ? I know an intelligent young creature when I see her ; and undeveloped as Elisabeth was three years ago, I am too much accustomed to young girls not to have discerned the quality of her intellect, and the strain of a mind as free

from worldly dross as any that I have happened to come across. Would to heaven she had had a little more; she might then, possibly, have avoided that particular net into which she ran her foolish little head. All this, however, we have discussed before; you know my views on Elisabeth and on your cousin. Do me the favor to go and see her, and tell me what you can gather concerning her life. If her husband has simply made her miserable, I can still, I think, forgive him; given the marriage, she must of necessity be miserable; but if she has deteriorated, if he has succeeded in warping and limiting her nature to his own narrow and stinted one, I will never forgive him—never. Who can say? A girl will do so much for the man she starts by adoring, even to dwarfing and repressing her own finest qualities. And yet Elisabeth, if I am not mistaken, had a good deal of independence of character, though her extreme diffidence hardly permitted her to show it, or even to recognize it herself. I cannot believe she will ever sink into that crushed rag of a wife that these girls with a religious ideal, and a genius for adoration, occasionally become. I have had no chance, I say, of ascertaining one way or the other, for I have been quite unable to get to England, and they do not come abroad. Last winter they spent again at Westport, which seems, on the whole, to suit Robert Holland's health. I don't understand about his health; last summer Elisabeth wrote about it more hopefully; he was able to occupy himself a great deal more in the parish, she said, than in the previous year. I presume he overworked again, and broke down, for he appears to have gone through a long illness afterward at Westport, and never to have got back to the point he had reached before. It is a dismal life—a dismal life. Emilia has invited them to Schlossberg—she would have arranged for them, you know—but they have never come. That is not Elisabeth's doing. She has often expressed to me, and it is the only expression of a wish she has allowed herself to utter, her longing to come to Schlossberg again; but they have never, since their marriage, crossed the Channel. In short, my dear Gordon, oblige me by going, if possible, to see them, and telling me what you think of Elisabeth. It is my first chance to get direct news of her. A second chance, indeed, lies before me. Otto tells me that he has offered his brother the use, during May and June (when he and Mathilde and the child are to be at Bingen), of the second floor of that old Palazzo he bought

in Venice a couple of years ago. He has had no answer from Robert yet, and has no idea whether the offer will be accepted. I think it not impossible; Otto is the only member of his family to whom Robert Holland has ever shown himself moderately civil; and if he is obliged to leave Thornton Briars again—I don't know what took him back there so early, but Elisabeth seemed to think it doubtful that they could stay on through the east winds—the fact that he would be lodged for nothing might have weight with him. If they go, I hope to be able to run over from Vienna and see Elisabeth. In the meantime, let me hear what you can of her.

"I look forward greatly to seeing you again, my dear Gordon; and if the nature of things should not bring you to Vienna, my school at Schlossberg will probably require my attention there in a month or two."

A letter from Madame von Waldorf was somewhat in the same strain.

"If you have a few hours to spare," she wrote, after giving her cousin various details concerning his father, "and it should not inconvenience you too much, you would do me a real favor by running down to Thornton Briars and bringing me some account of Robert. I gather from Elisabeth's letters that he is making very little progress just now; but though I believe she does her best to keep me informed as to his state, she has, I imagine, too little experience of illness, apart from that of Robert, either to form or to convey a very accurate judgment in the matter. Besides, no one who is constantly with an invalid is altogether qualified to judge of him. I have seen, as you know, nothing of either of them since their marriage, though again, last autumn, I pressed them very much to come here. Aunt Irma says that it is Robert's doing, and that his wife would be only too happy to come; but Elisabeth, to me, has never expressed any wish of the kind. Had she done so, I might have urged the matter still more strongly; but practically she and I still remain strangers—I don't know whether that is Robert's doing also; Aunt Irma would probably say that it is! She writes charming letters from time to time to your father about books and places, and so on. If you see her, do tell her how much pleasure they give him. 'Ah, here is a good little Elisabeth-letter,' he always says, when one arrives;

but—naturally, perhaps—they contain little that concerns her intimate home-life. So should you have time to go to Thornton Briars, you would be doing me a favor; but don't let it interfere with anything more important.

"In the meantime, we are counting the days till your arrival here; in about a fortnight, will it not be? Ida has a calendar, and marks off each day with the very blackest of ink. She wants to send you a little letter, she says; but as her little letters, in her very big handwriting, take up a great deal of room, I will leave all the rest of the space to her. On consideration, however, she says she is too busy to write to you, and begs me, therefore, to tell you that she had a birthday last week, and is now eight years old; that she is very glad you have come home, and hopes you will soon come here. So you see, dear Gordon, we are all in great haste to have you, even should you have to go away again, as I fear may be the case. We all feel you are getting to be too big a man for Schlossberg to hold you properly, but let us have as much of you as possible.

"Affectionately yours,

EMILIA."

Some ten days latter Gordon answered the Baroness's letter:

"I have been to Thornton Briars," he wrote; "it is a queer, out-of-the-way place; and though it is only about three hours from London, one feels a thousand miles away. I think Robert very ill: I doubt if his wife, who is with him constantly, realizes how ill he is; I am sure he does not himself. He was talking to me about some investments, and so on, as if he had fifty years of life before him. Mrs. Holland strikes me as one of the most interesting women I ever saw. She has not deteriorated; she is very greatly improved; but she is, I should say, very unhappy. She has everything to make her so.

"I hope to be at Schlossberg in three days, but I don't know how long I shall be able to remain. I have to go to Venice to hunt up some Oriental manuscripts, so I am afraid there is no chance of Vienna for the present. Come to Venice, therefore, by all means. I have no idea, though, whether Robert means to go there; he seemed perfectly undecided in his plans. As regards my father and Emilia, for what sort of an ungracious monster do you take me? Her kindness I can never repay; but, at least, I can ap-

preciate it. It would be an odd sort of appreciation to propose carrying off my father now. The plan may have had its drawbacks to me personally, but to him not one ; nor, I am bound to believe her, to Emilia either. I can only acquiesce with my eternal gratitude."

CHAPTER XXII.

THORNTON BRIARS.

Gordon Temple, arriving in Europe from the second journey he had made to the East in the last three years, had gone first to London, to report himself and his work to the society in whose interests he had been travelling ; and to look after certain money matters in which his own interest, as the Baroness had intimated, was happily reviving. A portion of his own fortune, which had at first seemed lost in the general wreck, had been rescued by the hands to which he had entrusted the management of his affairs ; his days of poverty were over, he was thankful to think, for his father, and for himself. This, and the warm reception he met with from his friends, and from the members of the society to which he was attached, put Gordon into excellent spirits. He found time, more readily than he might otherwise have done, to go down to Thornton Briars and visit Robert Holland. It was not a journey he greatly cared to undertake : he did not like his cousin ; his cousin did not like him ; he had no reason to expect a very cordial welcome at his journey's end. Having resigned himself, however, to the expedition in compliance with the wishes of the Baroness and Madame von Waldorf, he permitted himself some curiosity as to the success of a marriage concerning which he had heard so much discussion some three years back.

He reached Thornton Briars toward the close of a Saturday afternoon ; for a part of Saturday and a Sunday were, he found, the days he could best spare out of his engagements. He had not written to announce his arrival, for it was only at the last hour he had been able to decide on going ; and he took the precaution to ascertain in the little country town where the train left him, and he hired a vehicle for his ten miles' drive across country, whether there was any inn at Thornton Briars where he could put

up for the night. There was a little public house, he was told, where he would be made comfortable enough; and presently arriving, he alighted there to leave his bag and inquire the way to the vicarage. His drive had taken him across that charming, broken, undulating country, part fertile field and pasture-land, oak-studded and hedge-divided, part breezy and heathery moorland, that may be found in half a dozen directions within a radius of fifty or sixty miles from Charing Cross—a land dipping and rising to woods and meadows, to the long slope of brown fields divided by the differing brown of copses, to wide stretches of common, where black serrated lines of fir-trees cut sharp against the sky. But the ascent was continuous on the whole; Thornton Briars, he found, lay steeply on the ridge of a hill looking across line beyond line of smooth-backed downs rolling southward to the sea. It was a view that had the beauty of a vast landscape under a vast sky; white April clouds drifting across the blue heavens, casting fleeting shadows, or breaking into equally fleeting showers on the variegated land; silvery lights gleaming and shifting and gleaming again over the ploughed fields, the dark patches—they looked like cloud-shadows caught and held stationary—that marked the plantations and covers of some country seat, across the distant horizons that rose and sank and melted into pale blue-gray mists beyond an immense foreground of sloping meadows vivid with April green, enclosing a sweep of woods reddened by April buds. Commanding this wide expanse the village displayed itself like a hundred other English villages—an irregular line of latticed and gabled cottages, scattered and straggling up and down the brow of the hill among hedges, and paddocks, and tidy gardens. A butcher's shop, a baker's shop with sugar-sticks and loaves in a row, a post-office with more sugar-sticks, with ploughmen's boots and petroleum, with bacon and calico, seemed to represent the commerce of the place. One or two houses of more pretension stood squarely back from the road, separated by lawn and shrubbery and quickset hedge from their humbler neighbors; a brass plate attached to the gate of one of these showed it to be the residence of Dr. Fawcett, the doctor of the district. The vicarage, Gordon found, stood somewhat apart, beyond the village street, where hedges and meadows gave place again to an uneven stretch of moorland, broken into mounds and hollows, black now with last year's blackened

heather, and gray with sodden, uneven grass. Facing this waste-land stood the vicarage, separated from it only by the low white paling that enclosed a little front garden. It was a long gray stone building, of the last century probably, substantially built, stained with black streaks through stress of weather, with a straight upper row of windows, and a long low lattice on either side of the hall-door. It was a childless house, as Gordon knew; one might almost have guessed it, he thought, from the silent blankness with which it seemed to confront the world. A paved footway—there was no carriage-drive—divided the little garden and led straight up to the front door, flanked on either side by laurels. There were primroses and double daisies blooming in the narrow flower-beds; and to the right, separated by a slight iron fence from the garden and shrubbery that ran round that side of the house, lay a pasture green and sweet with clumps of flowering daffodils. To the left, a damp path, shadowed by a high laurel hedge, divided the vicarage to the north and east, from the neatly-kept churchyard, whose sunken graves and tombstones lay round the old square-towered church. The place, though not unpicturesque, looked desolate enough; but a gleam of western sunlight gilded it for the moment with a magic touch, giving it a suggestion of peaceful seclusion from a weary world. Gordon Temple rang at the front door-bell, and being presently confronted by a red-cheeked country maiden, was informed, in answer to his inquiries, that Mrs. Holland was at home. He presented his card, and was at once ushered into a parlor opening from the hall to the left of the doorway.

Two hours before Gordon rang at the bell, the heroine of these pages was seated in her own room up-stairs, crying. She soon dried her eyes, however, and began bathing them with cold water to efface all traces of her weeping. Her husband disliked above all things to see her with red eyes; he had often reproved her for her foolish trick of tears. It was true that Elisabeth cried rather often in these days. If anyone had asked her why, she might have replied, though she most certainly would not have done so, that she often cried because she was often unhappy. It was a matter, however, concerning which she made many good resolutions; and when surprised, as on this afternoon, into a fit of tears over some transitory ill, she made haste to check them, and remove every sign of grief before encountering her husband again. She bathed her eyes,

therefore, rubbing her cheeks the while to bring back a little color; then glancing at the mirror to assure herself that her face showed no signs of recent emotion, she opened her door and went out on to the wide landing that occupied the centre of the house, and from which an old broad-stepped staircase led to the hall below. Elisabeth, crossing the landing, paused a moment at a door that stood ajar, long enough to hear her name pronounced from within. She pushed the door open and entered.

The room—it had a cheerful aspect, with a window to the front and another at the side, commanding a wide and open view—was fitted up as a study, Mr. Holland having of late years transferred his books and papers from the room below, that had formerly been dignified by that name, finding it convenient to have a sitting-room that adjoined his bedroom, and to be spared, so far as possible, the fatigue of going up and down the stairs. He was lying now, stretched on a sofa facing the door, his feet covered with a knitted rug.

"My dear," he said, as Elisabeth appeared, "I should like my tea brought up here."

"Oh, I will bring it up directly," said Elisabeth; "I think it must be nearly ready; I'll go and see."

"And if Richards should call, tell him that I can't see him this afternoon; I am too much fatigued. He must come to-morrow morning instead."

"I'll tell him," said Elisabeth, going a step nearer to the sofa. "Oh, I am sorry you are so tired. Can't I do anything for you?"

"Nothing, my dear, thank you." He closed his eyes, but re-opened them in a moment.

"If Dulcie should come," he said, "I should like to be told. I may wish to speak to her."

Elisabeth, who was about to leave the room, paused at these words, her hand on the lock of the door.

"Won't that—won't that tire you as much as seeing Mr. Richards?" she said.

She had no sooner spoken than she was conscious of having spoken unwisely. Her husband simply repeated his former sentence.

"If Dulcie should come in I should like to be told. Jane can bring up the tea," he added, as Elisabeth turned to go.

"Yes," she answered. She stood still for a moment, then turned to her husband once more. "Would you like

me," she said, with a certain timidity, "to go and see that child of Mrs. Taylor's this afternoon? I should have plenty of time to go and come back before dark."

Mr. Holland, who had closed his eyes again, did not immediately reply. "Mrs. Taylor's child is very well cared for," he said then; "Dulcie and Richards are both looking after it; it is quite unnecessary for anyone else to go. Kindly shut the door after you, my dear; I feel the draught here when it is left ajar."

Elisabeth did as she was requested, and began slowly to descend the stairs. The house struck her—and yet she was used to it—as extraordinarily quiet, and yet echoing with emptiness. A clock ticking in the hall was the only sound; the rooms were for the most part empty and dismantled, curtains and carpets rolled up and folded away. Mr. Richards, the curate-in-charge, occupied a small house in the middle of the village; for eight or nine months in the year the vicarage stood vacant. Elisabeth went into the kitchen to give directions about the tea and see it carried up-stairs, and having presently finished her own simple repast, made her way into the sitting-room, which opened, as has been intimated, to the left of the hall door. It was the room in which she habitually sat, and for the most part sat alone, her husband's invalid habits making him often late in the morning; indeed, except for meals or for a stroll in the garden, he seldom cared to come down-stairs until the close of the afternoon. The drawing-room of Thornton Briars vicarage was a long low-ceiled room running from back to front of the house, with a wide lattice at either end, one looking on to the damp walk and high laurel hedge that masked the churchyard wall; the other, more cheerfully, on to the front garden and free expanse of the heathery waste beyond. But notwithstanding these advantages of light, and, on the whole, of sunshine, the room struck frigidly on entrance. It was the furniture, no doubt, that helped this chill aspect, the pale and cheap wall-paper, the indifferent steel engravings, the heavy chairs and tables—solid and heavy after the fashion of two generations back—the chintzes washed and faded out of all recognition of their hue, the sliding screens with landscapes worked in cross-stitch, the flowery carpet that retained of its former colors only enough to show how hideous it must once have been. On the high white mantelshelf above the fireless hearth a gilt-faced alabaster clock was set between two alabaster vases, flanked by a pair of

twinkling lustres; a no less twinkling chandelier hung suspended from the ceiling above the vast area of a round mahogany table that occupied the centre of the room; beyond, a small standing bookcase against the wall displayed a selection of those polite calf-bound and gilt-edged volumes that hold out the promise of some admirable vignette by Turner or Stothard, married to some less admirable verse by Rogers or Campbell. The whole room, in the pristine splendor of its present trappings, might have served—perhaps had served—as an appropriate background to the romance of some heroine in high comb and gigot sleeves and sandalled slippers; in its present condition it conveyed an impression, which was absolutely correct, of having been solidly furnished some fifty or sixty years before, and taken, as it was, at a valuation, by its present owner, who had not thought it necessary to bestow on it any affectation of freshness when he brought home his young wife. Elisabeth, who had had no chance of adding to its freshness on her own account—a soup-plate filled with primroses on the centre-table marked the limits of her powers in that direction—had necessarily accepted it as it was. She had not minded it at first; chairs and tables could have very little to say to her when she first arrived at Thornton Briars; and she did not always mind now. She did mind, that is to say; Elisabeth had some sensitiveness, it may be remembered, to her surroundings; and there were moments when she dreamed to herself of a charming and beautiful home such as she had glimpses of now and again in other houses. But, on the whole, she would have said that the furniture of a room could do little to add either to her happiness or her misery; and that in a sense was true, no doubt. Besides, the room might have been worse; it was decorous, and, on the whole, simple. Elisabeth knew of worse rooms than that.

She sat down now in a low chair near the empty hearth, and propping up an open book on the table beside her, took some plain work from a basket at her side, and fell to sewing and reading at the same time. Elisabeth, it may be remembered again, was not very fond of sewing; but having a good deal to do in these days, she had adopted the above simple expedient for beguiling those infelicitous hours. Now and then she looked up; she was on the watch for Mr. Richards, the curate; she wished to prevent his ringing the door-bell. In that silent house, every sound had a strange distinctness, and her husband might

be asleep. Presently she heard the click of the little garden-gate, and saw Mr. Richards—he was a tall and good-humored-looking young man, with a rosy face and tremendous energy—coming up the garden-path. Elisabeth sprang up, went to the hall door, and opening it, dismissed him in hushed tones. The curate looked at her kindly and sympathetically. He had an affection for his vicar, to whom he was indebted for some kindnesses and a great deal of good advice, by which he had profited; he was an excellent young man! But he always felt sorry for his vicar's wife, who knew nothing of his sympathy, and might probably have resented it if she had. He was himself engaged to be married to a young girl in London, and hoped some day to make her a happier home than that he imagined to lie within those old gray walls. He expressed his regret now, shook hands with Elisabeth, promised to come in the morning, and took himself off again with a swinging step down the garden path, leaving her to return to silence and her work.

She returned to her work, and resumed her needle and her book; but her needle presently slackened and slipped from her hand, whilst, with her eyes fixed on the pages of the book before her, she became absorbed in its contents. It was only a volume of Walter Scott; the vicarage bookcases offered nothing newer—hardly anything else—in fiction; but in truth, Elisabeth, who loved a story no less now than three years ago, loved no writer of stories better than Walter Scott. She became so absorbed, indeed, that she failed to hear the gate click a second time as Gordon Temple opened it and walked up the garden path. His ring at the bell startled her; visitors so seldom came to the vicarage. She looked up as the maid brought in his card, took it from her, and read the name. "Oh!" she cried, rising suddenly, and letting her work and book and scissors fall on the floor with a crash. She stooped to recover these properties, and as Gordon advanced from the open door, went forward to meet him. She held out her hand in welcome; a deep flush was on her cheeks. "I didn't know—it is a great pleasure to see you," she said.

The warmth of her greeting surprised Gordon, remembering, as he did, the shy and indifferent young girl he had known three years before at Schlossberg; but in a moment he perceived it was the memories he evoked rather than his own personality that excited her cordiality. She paused awkwardly enough after her impulsive wel-

come, and moved back to her seat; Gordon followed, and pulling a chair forward, sat down opposite to her by the fireless hearth. He wished it had not been fireless, for the spring afternoon was chilly; but some people, he knew, had traditions about fires, and put out their flames as the flowers came in; possibly his cousin acted on these. Elisabeth did not instantly speak; her color faded and then flushed up again as she seemed suddenly to remember it was her business to address her visitor.

"I didn't know you were in England; it is a great pleasure to see you," she said again, rather hurriedly. "Have you come straight from Schlossberg?"

"I have not been to Schlossberg," he answered; "I arrived in London from the East about ten days ago. I had business there that I was obliged to attend to before going home. I shall not be in Schlossberg till the middle of next week."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Elisabeth, disappointed; "I mean that I hoped you had perhaps brought me news from there. It seems such a long time since I saw anyone who had been to Schlossberg."

"Well, I have brought you news in a way," Gordon said. "I heard from Emilia, that is, a few days ago, and she gave me a message for you that I hasten to make my own, saying how much pleasure your letters give my father. It is very good of you to write to him. I thank you very much."

Elisabeth did not immediately answer; she sat looking down at her fingers lying loosely interlaced in her lap. "It has been a great pleasure to me," she said at last; "almost the greatest pleasure I have had. Your father is very kind. He writes to me also, occasionally a few lines himself, sometimes by Emilia, and tells me about books and what to read. I can't always get the books he names; still, I like to know, and now and then he sends one."

"Yes, yes, he would like to do that," said Gordon; "and you can't do better than to follow his advice. My father has lived upon books all his life, and he has the best judgment of any man I know. He lives less upon them now than formerly; he is too old to fix his mind just in the same way; the life that goes on outside his library to a certain extent engages his attention instead. That is why I know your letters must give him so much pleasure; and that was why I asked you, as I remember, to go to see him

sometimes that winter you spent at Schlossberg. You did so, I know; and I have often wanted to thank you for it."

"Oh?" said Elisabeth, coloring a little, "that was a very long time ago. It seems to me now like another life."

"But not," he said, smiling, "a life you have forgotten, I hope, since we were all so much concerned in it?"

"Oh, forgotten!" she said. She took up her sewing that she had laid down, and did a few stitches, but dropped it again immediately. She was nervous, Gordon perceived; he supposed it might be that his presence there was strange, and yet revived a great many familiar memories.

"How is Robert?" he inquired with some abruptness.

Her nervousness left her instantly. The sad familiarity of this every-day topic made her answer almost mechanical. "He is not very well, thank you," she answered; "he did not get on so well as we had hoped this winter at Westport, and I don't know that coming back here has done him any good yet, though he hoped it might. This is rather a bleak and windy place, you know, and our doctor at Westport did advise our staying on there another month. But it worries Robert very much to be away so long from his parish; and so we came home. We have been back nearly a month—a fortnight, I mean," she said, correcting herself.

"Does he go out? Can he get about?" said Gordon.

"Oh, yes; he goes out every day," she answered, with some surprise, "unless the weather is very bad indeed. Oh, there is nothing really the matter with him—that is what Dr. Fawcett here always says—nothing that could not be cured, I mean, if he could only get strong again. He was much better the winter before last; but last summer he overworked himself again, and has suffered from it ever since."

Gordon listened to these dreary commonplaces of an invalid life, that he seemed to have heard a thousand times already, and looked at the young face before him. For three years that fresh and springing life had been chained to that of a hopelessly sick man. What did she think of it? Under what aspect did her lot present itself to her own eyes? He felt a great curiosity to know. He looked again at Elisabeth. She had grown taller, he had thought when he came in; her figure, whilst retaining its girlish slenderness, had taken a somewhat fuller and more definite grace; he thought her greatly improved. She was

pale when the color, that came and went so promptly, faded ; her beautiful eyes were the same, but her expression had gained ; it had acquired depth and meaning, the change constantly seen in the face of a young girl after two or three years of married life. But she looked sad, and Gordon thought—Elisabeth had been less successful in her efforts than she had hoped—he thought she had been crying. Her dress was as plain as possible ; her uncle had died a few months previously, and she still wore tokens of mourning ; a gray gown simply fashioned of some woollen material, a little frill, and a black ribbon at her throat : a few primroses were thrust loosely into the front of her bodice. Gordon glanced at her, then turned away his eyes, and presently glanced again. He found her very greatly improved. She was still so young—one-and-twenty only the other day—that in this secluded dwelling, this silent, faded room, something still of the rudeness of a young girl's ignorance of life seemed to mingle with her later experience, and give it a singular charm. She was not the little schoolgirl he had known ; but still less was she the conventional, well-regulated mistress of a house. Hardly had the first warmth of her welcome died away, when something of the shy look he remembered came back into her eyes. But it had a peculiar charm, or he thought so, in a face that bore the impress of extreme intelligence. Elisabeth was charming—that was how she struck him ; charming too, through a certain, suggestiveness, something of distinction, of fineness, of difference ; and thinking of his cousin Robert, Gordon wondered again with what eyes she had come to regard her lot in life. But as he could not ask her, he simply replied to her last remark.

"I can imagine," he said, "how Robert would overwork himself if he had the chance. I have always heard what an excellent and indefatigable worker he is. Besides," he added, good-humoredly, with the frank criticism of a near relative, "he is rather an obstinate fellow, I take it. There would be no moving him when he had once set his mind on a thing."

She made no reply whatever to this. Her silence disconcerted Gordon, who had spoken good-naturedly and thoughtlessly enough, and perceived he might have stumbled upon a serious criticism. He was searching his brains for some remark with which to cover his awkwardness, when she rose with some abruptness.

"I will tell Robert you are here," she said; "he will like to know."

She moved toward the door and opened it, then paused and turned, still holding the handle.

"I beg your pardon," she said, confusedly; "I ought, perhaps, to have asked—I ought to have told you. It is so good of you to come and see us; no one has ever come before. But did you know what an out-of-the-way place this is, and how difficult it is to get away from? There is no train back to town to-night, and to-morrow being Sunday, there will not be one either until late in the afternoon."

Gordon stared. He did not in the least catch her meaning for the moment; he could only suppose himself, as he had apprehended beforehand might be the case, an unwelcome visitor.

"My dear Mrs. Holland," he said, "I did study my Bradshaw carefully before I came down. But don't imagine I am going to inflict myself upon Robert more than he quite likes. I dare say he is not always in the mood for visitors, and I am so fond of the country that a spring day and a long walk are the most delightful diversion possible to me."

Elisabeth stared in her turn.

"Oh! how could you think I meant that?" she cried, with an accent of the utmost sincerity, suddenly perceiving the intention of his words. She closed the door behind her, and came back a few paces into the room. "I only meant that this place is so dull, and on Sunday especially, that I couldn't imagine how anyone could care to stay here. You don't know how welcome a visitor is."

"Well," said Gordon, smiling, and with a good deal less of sincerity, "I suppose I may have flattered myself with some idea of the kind in coming down. At any rate, I promised myself a great deal of pleasure; that is how I came prepared for a twenty-four hours' stay, and have brought a bag with me that has found very comfortable quarters at the inn."

"At the Roebuck? But that is a very little place," said Elisabeth; "I am afraid you won't be at all comfortable there. We might—I am sure we might give you a room here. I will speak to Robert."

She vanished from the room without waiting for an answer. Gordon heard her voice giving some order to the maid, and then her light step as she ran quickly up the stairs. The house struck him, also, as extraordinarily

still ; he could not hear a sound except the clock ticking in the hall. Then a man with clanking pails passed the window along the path by the laurel hedge, and directly afterward the red-cheeked girl came in to put a match to the fire, which was ready laid. She retired again, leaving Gordon to the entertainment of the crackling wood. He looked round the room, which, cheered by the brightening flames, presented an aspect less frigid than on his entrance. He looked at everything—at the worsted-work screens, the washed-out chintz, the alabaster clock, the polite bookcase. There were gaps here and there in the shelves, left by volumes that had strayed on to the centre-table. Gordon took these up one after another to examine them. A volume of Wordsworth, a volume of "Paradise Lost," a pictorial annual with steel-engraved views of Italy, a volume of Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets ;" this admirable but unexhilarating literature had apparently been culled from the decorous shelves by the mistress of the house for her mental improvement. A more modern touch was imparted by a German periodical containing some account of the expedition in which Gordon Temple had been engaged—sent, the young man supposed, by his father—and a lighter one by the volume of Walter Scott that lay by Elisabeth's work-box. Certainly, it was not a cheerful room. The clock ticked in the hall, the silence brooded. There seemed nothing quite alive but the crackling flames and the fresh scent of the primroses.

Presently Elisabeth came back. It struck him—but he might have been mistaken—that her cheeks were flushed, her lips a little tremulous. She spoke, however, without hesitation.

"My husband will be down directly," she said. "And I am so vex—so sorry,"—she corrected the word immediately—"but the house is so dismantled that Robert thinks it would be impossible to give you a room where you would be at all comfortable. He will explain to you——"

"Don't speak of it," said Gordon, sorry for her. "I assure you, my dear Mrs. Holland, I never for one moment contemplated the atrocity of quartering myself upon you. I know what it is when people have to move about as much as you do ; one camps, one doesn't settle. I dare say you yourself feel very much as if you were living in an hotel here."

"I don't think it's so pleasant as that," she said, smiling a little. She went back to her seat, and took up her work

again. "Robert will be down directly," she repeated. "He has taken a room up-stairs for his study ; it opens out of his bedroom, and is more convenient."

"I hope I am not disturbing him ?" said her companion. "Perhaps he is writing his sermon or something, as it is Saturday."

"Oh, no !" said Elisabeth, with a startled look ; "he never preaches. There is nothing the doctors have forbidden so strictly as that. It would exhaust him too much." She paused. "I have never heard my husband preach but once," she said, slowly ; "it was one Sunday at Schlossberg before our marriage, more than three years ago."

The words were simple, but spoken with an undefinable accent. It was not mere regret, not mere disappointment ; her companion had no clew to the feeling it might express. Whatever it might be, she offered no interpretation, but spoke again instantly in a direct reaction from her last words.

"I think," she said, "no one could have been so good as Robert has been about giving up preaching, for he cared about it very much. He was a very good preacher. It is not only I who say so," she said, coloring a little, "I have only, as I said, heard him once : everyone says so."

"Yes, yes ; I am sure of it," said Gordon. "I remember that occasion at Schlossberg—I don't mean that I heard him, but I remember my cousin Emilia speaking at the time of her brother's sermon. It impressed her very much. It must be a great trial to him to have to give it all up. But he can still attend to parish work, you say ?"

"Yes ; sometimes he can. And it is good for him in moderation, the doctor says ; it is an interest for him. You know," Elisabeth said, looking up and smiling, "life is very quiet here, and not very interesting for him outside his work."

"Ah, that is a pity !" said Gordon, rather vaguely. "Something to distract his mind—that would be better, I dare say. How about Westport ? Is that more amusing for him ?"

"Yes ; in some ways he finds it more amusing. There is more society ; there are a good many tea-parties, you know. We can go to them when he is well enough."

"Robert likes them ?" said Gordon.

"Yes ; he likes them. And it is good for him to have anything that diverts his thoughts a little. That is why we go. We go to a good many."

"In short," said her companion, smiling, "you spend the winter in a round of gayety."

"Oh!" cried Elisabeth, roused to irrepressible utterance by the deadly irony of this speech, "if you knew how terribly dull they are!" She checked herself, and at the same moment a passing shadow darkened the window outside. The hall-door was opened and shut as by one familiar with the house, and the next minute a rap came at the parlor-door.

"Is Mr. Holland here?" said someone, opening it and looking in.

CHAPTER XXIII.

INTRODUCES DULCIE.

Elisabeth jumped up at the words. The new-comer, a young girl of about her own age apparently, had put her head in at the door, displaying beneath the circumference of a black felt hat a pair of bright eyes, a pair of fair cheeks, a pair of fresh red lips. She gave a rapid glance round the room.

"He is not here?" she said.

"My husband is up-stairs. I'll tell him," said Elisabeth, moving toward the door.

"No, no, don't trouble," cried the young girl. "If he is in the study, I can find him."

She shut the door and was gone. Elisabeth stood irresolute for a moment; then, crossing the room with rapid step, opened the door and stood with the handle in her hand. The click of a closing lock was heard from the landing above. She let her hand fall, slowly pushed the door to, and came back to her seat.

"I am sorry," she said, sitting down again; "I am afraid Robert may be detained some time now."

"That young lady has perhaps come on business," Gordon suggested.

"Yes; I suppose so." She sat perfectly silent for awhile. There was—her visitor might have been justified in remarking—a surprising mixture of diffidence and want of ceremony in her manner. In a moment, however, she rallied her attention. "That was Dulcie Fawcett," she said, "the daughter of our old doctor. She has lived here

all her life, and knows everyone; and my husband finds her very useful in helping him. We are so much away that I don't know about things as she does. I'm not so clever about them, either," Elisabeth went on ingenuously. "I never can take a class properly in the Sunday-school—the children seem to know everything I can tell them already; and I don't like ordering the poor people about—it seems to me impertinent. I suppose it isn't really, if you do it the right way. Miss Fawcett does."

"These are dreadful confessions for a vicar's wife," said Gordon, smiling.

"Oh, I know—" she said, and suddenly stopped, flushing a deep red. Gordon began to divine some complication, and to be extremely interested. She changed the conversation abruptly, shaking her head as if to shake some importunate thought away. "I have been reading—" she began, with a transition to her odd, shy manner. "I have been so much interested in reading," she resumed, "a paper in that Review your father was good enough to send me, about your travels in the East. I hope you succeeded in accomplishing all you wanted to do."

"Well, not entirely," he said. "Still, considering the difficulties in the way, we—my companion and myself—were tolerably successful, I think. We went to hunt up dialects, you know, in some of those out-of-the-way districts to the north of Persia."

"I know," said Elisabeth, "it tells one something about it in the Review; you have seen the article, I dare say."

"Well, no, I can't say I have." He took the Review from the table and began turning it over. "It seems full of mistakes," he said. "I know the man who wrote it; he's a very good fellow, and he pays me several handsome compliments, I see; but I don't think he has any very special knowledge of the subject. However, it doesn't much matter."

"It is full of mistakes? Oh, I am sorry!" said Elisabeth. "I thought it so interesting. Would you mind telling me what they are?"

"That would bore you, I am afraid," said Gordon, good-naturedly.

"Oh, no, I should like it—it would interest me very much," she said, "unless it would bore you."

"Me? On the contrary," he answered; "what can be more delightful than to find someone else all in the wrong? In the first place he's gone astray in some of his locali-

ties, and small blame to him; but if you have an atlas, Mrs. Holland, I believe I can make you understand our route."

"An atlas?" said Elisabeth, rather vaguely. She went to the bookcase and glanced up and down the shelves. "There is not one here," she said, turning round. "I think there must be one up-stairs in the study; I'll go and fetch it." She moved to the door as she spoke; then stopped short. "Perhaps I had better wait," she said, "Miss Fawcett has called, I suppose, to go through some parish accounts; and Robert always dislikes being disturbed when he is busy with accounts. I will fetch it presently, if you don't mind."

"It is no matter whatever," he said. "I dare say I can explain without; I have travelled over the ground pretty often in every sense." He began his explanation with a brief passing wonder as to whether her husband had made her afraid to disturb him. Elisabeth listened with extreme attention; now and then she asked a question; her interest drew Gordon on. He found it delightful—as who would not?—to talk of his work to a charmed and charming listener. All at once the gilt-faced clock on the mantelpiece struck a half-hour. Elisabeth looked up startled, and sprang to her feet.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but I think I will go and fetch the atlas now. It is so bad for Robert to occupy himself too long with business. No, there he is," she added immediately, dropping again into her chair. Voices and footsteps were heard in the hall outside. The sitting-room door opened. "Well, well, run home now, if you must, but come back to supper," the vicar of Thornton Briars could be heard saying; the next moment he entered the room alone.

He entered with the dragging, invalid gait that ill-health had made a habit with him; and his cousin, who had not seen him for more than three years, was shocked by the change in his appearance; to him he had the air of a dying man. His face and hands were of an extreme pallor; his grizzled hair and beard were grown thin; his clothes hung loosely about him. Elisabeth sprang up again on his entrance, and went forward as though to aid his faltering steps; but she only pulled forward a large armchair. He held out his hand to his cousin with a sort of cold languor, and sank at once into the seat.

"How are you, Gordon?" he said. "My dear," he went

on, without waiting for an answer, "that is not much of a fire you have there."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Elisabeth, taking some logs from a basket and hastening to throw them on. "I was afraid you might find the room too warm."

"No, no," he said, leaning forward and spreading out his hands. "I like a cheerful blaze as the evening draws in ; and I see no reason why we shouldn't have one, as we have the wood given us—no reason at all."

"That sounds like a very neighborly gift," said Gordon, by way of saying something.

"Yes, the Squire supplies us with wood, so there's no reason why we shouldn't burn it. That is economy in the wrong place." He leaned back in his chair, stretching out his feet to the warmth, and there was a minute's silence. It was broken by Elisabeth.

"Mr. Temple is going to Schlossberg next week, Robert," she said.

"Going to Schlossberg, eh ?" said her husband, without moving. "Well, now, there are few places I would not rather go to than to Schlossberg."

"Ah, we all regret that," said Gordon. He rose and stood with his arm resting on the mantelpiece. "Emilia would have been so glad to welcome you there from time to time," he said ; "it has been a disappointment to her that you could never be persuaded to come. Perhaps Otto will be more fortunate. I hear he has offered you the use of his house in Venice next month."

"Oh !" cried Elisabeth, starting forward. The color rushed to her cheeks. "Oh, have you accepted, Robert ? Why didn't you tell me ?"

"There it is ; you oughtn't to have been told, now," said Mr. Holland, smoothing down his mustache and beard with one finger. "My wife is always like a child with a treat in prospect," he said, addressing his cousin directly for the first time ; "it is best not to tantalize her beforehand."

Elisabeth made no response ; she colored more deeply, and leaned back in her chair.

"I am sorry, Gordon," Mr. Holland pursued, without change of tone, "not to be able to put you up here ; but you won't find yourself uncomfortable at the inn. It is kept by very respectable people, and their charges are moderate, I believe."

Gordon swallowed a laugh. "It doesn't look," he said,

"like a place for reckless expenditure, certainly; but it looks extremely comfortable. I have a little bedroom I don't feel worthy to sleep in, all white dimity and lavender. As for taking me in here, don't, of course, trouble yourself about it for one moment. In fact, Mrs. Holland and I have settled about all that already."

"Ah, you have settled about it!" said Mr. Holland, turning his eyes on his wife. He was silent for a moment. "You will stay to supper, of course," he said then; "that is, if you can put up with our plain ways. We dine early and sup at eight. Those are not the hours you are accustomed to, I presume, and my invalid habits, not to speak of other considerations, compel me to be simple in my diet. But you won't expect luxury in a country vicarage, and what there is, is very much at your service. My dear, I hope you have enough supper for us all?"

"I—I don't know," said Elisabeth, looking rather scared. Her thoughts had been elsewhere; she had not heard a word of her husband's last speech.

"Because my cousin will give us the pleasure of his company; and I have asked Dulcie Fawcett to come in also. Not that I am on ceremony with her," he added, turning to Gordon; "she is a good little girl, and understands our plain ways."

"Pray don't stand on cermony with me, either," said Gordon, feeling rather uncomfortable. He would willingly have declined the invitation, but the way in which it had been put made it difficult to do so. "You must remember," he said, "that I am a traveller, and understand plain ways as well as anyone. Don't, I entreat you," he added, awkwardly enough, to Elisabeth, who had started up—"don't give yourself any trouble on my account."

"It is no trouble at all," she said, rather confusedly; "but I think I had better go and see." And she left the room, animated by a lively consciousness of the three poached eggs and mess of boiled rice and milk that, without her active interference, would alone grace the supper-board at eight o'clock.

My heroine's establishment at this period of her history consisted of one maid, who united in herself the functions of cook, parlor-maid and house-maid, and of a man who did the rough jobs in and out of doors. She had in previous summers had at her command a larger suit of attendants; but Mr. Holland, on their return home some two or three weeks previously, had decided that, with their

present simple style of living, the willing and active Jane, who left them each year during the winter, pledging herself to return to them for the summer, would suffice for all their needs. Two-thirds of the rooms, therefore, were shut up—the vicarage was rather a rambling structure within, though presenting a substantial front to the world without—and the rosy-cheeked young woman who had opened the door to Gordon ruled sole occupant of the kitchen. Elisabeth, on entering that cheerful apartment, found her handmaid engaged in the confection of a Sunday cap, the rice having been set down to boil, and the moment not yet having arrived for poaching the eggs. The kitchen had a cheerful air, as kitchens are wont to have, with their ruddy ample blaze lighting up the whiteness of the plain deal furniture and the rows of blue crockery. Nevertheless, it struck Elisabeth with a certain sense of bareness as she came in—perhaps a chill reflection from her consciousness of a somewhat bare larder beyond.

"Jane," she said, "what is there we can have for supper?"

"Lor, mum," said that willing damsel, looking up, "there's what there always is. You know master don't like no change. I can't think how he, nor you neither, mum, can go on day after day, week in, week out, like that. Only you do eat so little, both on you."

"Oh, I eat plenty," said Elisabeth, smiling a little. "It is I who eat it almost all, I am afraid; and I don't mind what we have so long as it suits your master. Only we must have something else to-night, because Mr. Temple is here. What is there?"

"There ain't nothing, mum," said the perplexed Jane. "We finished up every scrap at dinner to-day. There's the chicken that is to roast for to-morrow's dinner, and that's all. You know master don't like ever to have more than is just necessary; he says it makes so much waste."

"I know, I know," said Elisabeth, hastily. She leant against the high mantelpiece, gazing blankly before her. "I wish——" she began, but left the phrase unfinished. Jane, meanwhile, exercised her more fertile imagination.

"There's eggs, mum," she pursued; "we always have two or three of them extra, because of Miss Dulcie's coming in so often. I could poach two or three more of them if that 'd do; or I could boil one or two to make a change."

"Oh, no," said Elisabeth, with a movement of impa-

tience. "I *can't* ask Mr. Temple to sit down to supper on eggs and boiled rice and milk. You must just run down to the butcher's, Jane, and ask him to let us have anything he has got; chops or—or anything."

"But there ain't time, mum," said Jane, blankly, in her turn. "It's ten good minutes to go, and ten to return, and it wants but twenty minutes or so of eight now, and master can't bear to be kept waiting a minute. If I'd known a bit earlier, we could ha' had anything."

"Well, well, we didn't know," said Elisabeth, quickly. "And certainly your master mustn't be kept waiting, it exhausts him so much." She stood lost in despondency for a minute. "I know," she said then, fired with an inspiration; "I will run down the hill to Ashtree Farm, and borrow a pie of Mrs. Dawson; she always bakes on Saturday for the week, I know, and she is so good-natured, she won't mind. We can pay her back next week."

"Shan't I go, mum?" said Jane. "You'll find the pie heavy to carry, I'm afraid. Mrs. Dawson's pies are like that. You might throw 'em against a stone wall and it'd make no difference."

"No, no, it doesn't matter, and I'd better go," said Elisabeth. "It won't take me five minutes to run there, and you must look after the supper, Jane. I shall be back in plenty of time."

She left the kitchen, took her hat from a peg in the hall, and running down the garden-path and out at the gate, began to cross the heathery common to where a steep, furze-grown lane, descending to fertile hollows, led to Ashtree Farm. She was hardly ten yards from the house, however, when her rapid progress was checked by a lady in a long cloak and a brown straw hat tied under her chin, who approached her over the hillocks from an opposite direction. Elisabeth recognized her through the thickening dusk; it was Mrs. Fawcett, the wife of the village doctor.

"Ah, good evening, Mrs. Holland," she said; "can you tell me if Dulcie is still at the vicarage?"

"She is not there now," said Elisabeth, checking her rapid steps, and pausing in an attitude of suspense; "but she is coming back, I believe, to supper at eight."

"Ah, that is what I thought probable," murmured the lady. "You and Mr. Holland are so kind—so very kind in inviting her. Dulcie says she feels quite at home in your house. We are very willing that she should go, you know; still, we are always pleased when she spends an

evening at home." Dulcie's mamma paused, and stood gazing rather vaguely at the sky. She was a small woman, between forty and fifty, with a long nose and a vague and eager eye. "You are in a hurry," she said suddenly to Elisabeth. "Well, I will give myself the pleasure of walking a few steps with you. I wished to ask you, my dear Mrs. Holland, if you could request the vicar to persuade Dulcie to give up some of her parish work. It isn't that she does so much; that's just where it is—she does so little!"

Mrs. Fawcett paused, but she did not wait for an answer, which, indeed, Elisabeth was not ready in giving.

"She does so little," the doctor's wife resumed. "That is, she takes it up and drops it again, and it is so very inconvenient, my dear Mrs. Holland. I have the doctor's shirts and socks to look after, of course, and he is particular about his cooking, too; and then I like to keep up an intelligent interest in the events of the day. In a little out-of-the-way place like this, it is so necessary. I assure you, that though I never pay visits, I never have an hour unoccupied. And then when Dulcie neglects her parish work, it comes upon me. I can't let everything go wrong; you can understand that, my dear Mrs. Holland; but it is so very inconvenient! If the Vicar could only persuade her to let Miss Myles do it instead! Miss Myles is a very capable person, and most willing, I am sure."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Elisabeth. She was silent for a minute. "I suppose it is my business, really," she said; "if we were always at home, it is I who ought to do it."

"My dear, you are very little at home, and you have your husband to look after," said Mrs. Fawcett, reasonably. "Of course there are drawbacks when the Vicar is away most of the year, but that has nothing to do with Dulcie. Mr. Richards is a most excellent young man, but Dulcie doesn't find him an incentive; that is what it is; she is used to him, and he is engaged to be married, and that always makes a man dull, she says. Now, Mr. Holland is an incentive, and when he is at home, she likes doing the work; but he is away all the winter, and then it comes upon me. It isn't that she's not clever enough," Dulcie's mother continued. "It often surprises me, when she takes up the books again, to see how she runs through all the accounts and gets them into her head in half an hour or so. Of course the Vicar's an incentive, Dulcie has always been fond of him; but I don't suppose he knows how very in-

convenient it is to me! If he would only tell Dulcie she had better hand over her books once and for all to Miss Myles, I dare say she might attend to him. It is of no use my speaking to her. You will find that out for yourself some day, my dear, when you have a daughter old—taller, I mean, than yourself, who likes her own way; what you say will have very little effect upon her, you'll find. She will do as she likes."

Mrs. Fawcett gave a small laugh with these last words, as if to qualify their severity. Elisabeth did not laugh; she stood looking straight before her for a moment rather drearily.

"I am sorry," she said again. "I—I don't think I can do anything, Mrs. Fawcett." She fell into awkward silence.

"Ah, well, never mind, my dear," said Mrs. Fawcett, relapsing into vagueness, and looking about her. "Don't trouble yourself; it doesn't matter, you know. Perhaps I may see the Vicar myself some day. My kind regards to him, my dear Mrs. Holland; I am sorry always to hear how far from strong he is. Good-by, my dear. I wish I had time to see more of you; but you're busy and I'm busy, and that is how it is."

"I know," said Elisabeth, who in fact saw Mrs. Fawcett hardly half a dozen times in the course of the year. She left her now, and ran quickly down the lane to Ashtree Farm. It was long past sunset, and twilight filled the hollow. She hastened on to where a light gleaming from a lattice through the trees showed the farmhouse standing among ricks and barns.

Gordon Temple, who had returned to his inn to make some brief toilet before appearing at Mrs. Holland's supper table, was surprised, as he emerged from the village street, to see his hostess preceding him on the way to the vicarage across the dusky heath. She was walking quickly, yet with a certain halting step which explained itself only when he approached near enough to perceive that she was supporting with both hands a burthen enveloped in a cloth. He wondered what she could be carrying; he had begun to wonder several things about her; he felt a great curiosity concerning her life. The sentiment he had expressed in regard to her marriage three years ago returned upon him with redoubled force; he felt that it ought to have been prevented; it was not clear to him that he ought not to have prevented it himself. Gordon did not like his cousin, and he held that he had reasons

that justified his dislike. He was one of the very few people who had known of that early lapse that had threatened to break Robert Holland's life in two ; it was he, in fact, who lent the money that had helped to rescue the young man from the hideous dilemma in which he had placed himself. Robert, driven to his wits' end, urged by the most wretched despair, had had recourse to his cousin Gordon as the only man from whom he could reasonably look for help. Why should not Gordon help him? He was rolling in riches ; it was his business to help him ; that was how he put it. He went straight to his cousin—Gordon, who was then at Cambridge, happened fortunately to have come up to London for the Easter vacation—and almost demanded the loan of two or three hundred pounds. Gordon lent them willingly enough ; it mattered little to him, in fact, one way or the other, in those days. Needless to say that Robert Holland made no explanation of the purpose for which he required the money ; but it was revealed to Gordon by a simple accident, of which the details do not concern us here. He had never known—he did not know to this day—whether Robert was informed of this untoward knowledge of his or not. He supposed not ; yet sometimes he suspected that he was. The knowledge in itself, as of an isolated fact, would have made little difference finally in Gordon's estimate of his cousin ; a man, he held, might fall and repent and rise again, and be as good a man or a better man than before. What he could not get over, as the phrase is, was the fact that Robert made no effort whatever to repay the money. It was not that he wanted the debt paid ; he cared nothing for that ; it was that he felt a man of honor would have sacrificed everything to wipe off the least stain clinging to him from so odious a catastrophe. He could not, of course, have paid it at once ; but at the end of ten years the debt remained, not repudiated—on the contrary, there was some small interest that Gordon might always claim —but unpaid by so much as a single shilling. By degrees Gordon came to understand that he did not consider his honor involved in paying it at all ; and then it was that his opinion of his cousin, an opinion confirmed by a hundred sorry coincidences, became definitely fixed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SUPPER-PARTY.

Of course he knew that he could not have prevented the marriage; it was no business of his to rake up that miserable scandal and drag it across Robert Holland's path; but he had felt sorry then for the young girl; he felt profoundly sorry for her now. He overtook Elisabeth where the road, rising as it parted from the village street to cross the moorland, afforded that unbroken view of the immense sweep of down and sky that had claimed his admiration a couple of hours previously. Fold after fold of misty gray, confounding the long rolling dip and rise of the lines of hill in one great dimness beneath the gathering night, reached now to the horizon. Lights twinkled from farm or hamlet, lying deep here and there in some darkling hollow; but up above not a gleam from the vast palpitating vault of heaven was lost, from the faint throbbing of the stars that quivered through the gray into the light, to the last far-withdrawn glow from the receding day, lingering below heavy rain-clouds on the western horizon. Elisabeth, arrived at this point, halted a moment to re-adjust the burthen she carried, before hurrying along the remaining strip of road that led to the vicarage gate. She gave a start as Gordon, coming up behind, accosted her.

"Allow me to carry that for you up to the house," he said, with a sense of large indefiniteness in the pronoun. It might have been a baby she was conveying with so much care.

"Oh no, thank you," said Elisabeth, rather flurried; "I can manage very well." As she spoke, the cloth, slipping on to the ground, left revealed an immense pie. Mrs. Dawson had eight sturdy children, and would have regarded anything short of about a yard of pie-crust as a frivolity hardly worth baking. Elisabeth stood crimson and helpless; she considered the moment tragic. Her companion picked up the cloth with which the farmer's wife had enveloped this trophy of her culinary skill.

"What a splendid pie!" he said, not quite knowing what to say; "I wish you would let me carry it for you."

"No, indeed, thank you," said Elisabeth, hurriedly; "it is only a little way now; I don't mind."

She walked on quickly with Gordon at her side. He did not repeat his offer, though he found a certain embarrassment in walking empty-handed beside a charming young woman weighed down by what appeared to be about a ton of pie-crust. If, as is probable, he thought his cousin's style of house-keeping primitive, he naturally kept the reflection to himself. When he spoke it was to comment on the beauty of the evening and the view.

"You spoke of this as a bleak and windy place," he said; "but it has no appearance or feeling of bleakness now. One has to come to England for an evening and a view like this—this long mild twilight, and a view at once so wide and so homelike."

"Now—oh, yes, it is pleasant now," said Elisabeth. She stood still a moment, looking a little wistfully across the twilight country to the dim horizon. "We always have warm days like these in April," she said; "it is in May and June that it is so cold here. There is no protection from the east winds, and Robert feels them very much."

They had reached the vicarage gate. As Gordon opened it and stood aside to let her pass, "What do you think of this Venice scheme?" he said.

He had no sooner spoken the words than he was conscious of an indiscretion. Elisabeth did not immediately answer. "I don't think of it at all," she said at last, in an odd, curt voice. She spoke no more till they were entering the house. "I never like, you know," she said then, modifying her words with a fleeting, diffident smile, "to think beforehand about anything I wish for very much; it is too disappointing when one is disappointed."

She set down her pie on a chair, crossed the hall, and opened the sitting-room door. "Will you excuse me?" she said to Gordon. "You will find Robert in here, and Miss Fawcett, I think. I will be down in five minutes."

She vanished through a swing door. The drawing-room, Gordon found on entering, was lighted only by the flickering flames of the wood fire, that made a ruddy and fitful illumination, revealing Mr. Holland stretched out in a big armchair on one side of the hearth, and the young lady of whom Gordon had already had a passing glimpse seated in Elisabeth's chair on the other. Mr. Holland at once effected an introduction. He seemed in a less constrained, a more genial mood than half an hour previously.

"My cousin, Gordon Temple, Miss Fawcett," he said.

"Miss Fawcett," he continued in a voice of great kindness, "is my right hand in the parish—my second curate. I don't know what I should do without her."

"Oh, no, not all that!" said the young lady, in modest deprecation; "of course I am glad to do what I can."

"That must be very delightful for you," said Gordon, addressing his cousin, as he moved a chair forward and seated himself. "In your long absences from the parish it must be a great comfort to you to know that you have an efficient substitute."

"Oh, no, not all that!" said the young lady again, with a laugh. She twirled an old-fashioned handscreen that she had taken from the high mantelpiece as she spoke; but Gordon, looking at her, perceived that she was quite self-possessed. She was rather pretty, he saw, the firelight revealing her features with sufficient distinctness; her face was a little thin, but fair and fresh-colored; her smooth light hair was drawn back and twisted in a thick coil at the back of her head; her eyes were bright, though rather small, and very restless. Her whole person was restless; her hand wandered over her dress; she was constantly adjusting a fold or pulling out a frill. Gordon addressed himself to her.

"You have a delightful country here in which to exercise your—your profession," he said, with a smile; "I was admiring the view just now as I came along."

"Oh, yes, it is a beautiful view; everyone admires it," said Miss Fawcett; "I am glad you like it, too. I love Thornton Briars; I was born here, you know; though, of course, it is a little out of the world. That will have struck you, I dare say."

"Oh, no doubt; a village ten miles distant from a station is considered a good deal out of the world," said Gordon; "though, after all, nothing is very much out of the world in these days—hardly enough so, as a rule; one doesn't get variety enough; everything is too much like everything else."

"Well, there is something pleasant about that, too," said Miss Fawcett, glancing from Gordon to Mr. Holland; "I mean, it is pleasant to think that if one ever were to leave home, one would not feel quite astray in the world. If I ever go abroad—I long to go abroad—I shall always like everything that reminds me of Thornton Briars."

"Ah, well, don't be in a hurry, my dear," said Mr. Holland. "Young people are in too great a hurry to leave

their homes in these days. Home is the best place for them, depend upon it."

"Oh, that is what I say; I love home better than anything," said Miss Dulcie. "Still, one does long to see something of the world sometimes; don't you think so?" she said, appealing to Gordon.

"I suppose I do," he said, smiling, "as I began to travel ten years ago, and have been travelling more or less ever since. Sometimes now, though, I begin to think a settled home would be pleasant for a change."

"Do you really?" she said. She kept glancing from the fire to Gordon, and back to the fire again; now she sat considering for a moment, her eyes fixed on the flames. "Yes, I can imagine that," she said, after that moment of deliberation. "After so many years of wandering, a settled home must seem delightful. I think I can imagine just the sort of home that you would like."

Gordon broke into a laugh. "That is very clever of you," he said; "for, to tell you the truth, I have given hardly ten minutes' thought to the subject."

The young girl laughed also, and her laugh seemed to show that she quite appreciated the estimate Gordon had formed of her cleverness. She seemed to be a young lady who got over the preliminaries of an acquaintanceship very rapidly. "Oh, I meant, of course, the sort of home that would suit anyone who had been wandering a great deal about the world," she said; "something not too large or splendid; something home-like, and *intime* like this." She rose from her seat as she spoke, and replaced her hand-screen on the mantelpiece as Mr. Holland slowly lifted himself from his armchair and stood up.

"I don't know where my wife is," he said. "She will be down directly, I suppose; but we will not wait for her. I hear eight striking, and supper is ready, I have no doubt. We needn't stand on ceremony. Come, Dulcie, my dear."

He moved toward the door as he spoke; Miss Fawcett followed him, and Gordon—he was wondering where Miss Dulcie had got hold of the word *intime*, which she pronounced very badly—could do no less, though the want of ceremony implied in going in to supper without the mistress of the house seemed to him excessive. At that moment, however, the door opened and Elisabeth appeared.

"Supper is ready," she said; "shall we go into the dining-room?"

They crossed the entry, and entered a room of a curi-

ously uninviting aspect. It was chilly, for the fire had only recently been lighted; and the substantial furniture, of the same date as that of the sitting-room, presented a heavy monotony of black horse-hair and mahogany, unrelieved by any livelier tint than that of the dark-green moreen curtains that hung before the windows. The genius of inhospitality seemed to preside over this dreary apartment, originally dedicated to social festivities; it was impossible to imagine it could ever have been the scene of a cordial welcome or a genial repast. A small petroleum lamp, with a blue glass stem and an imitation bronze stand, illuminated that feast with whose preparation we are acquainted—the dish of poached eggs, the boiled rice and milk, the immense pie. Gordon observed Elisabeth color deeply as she entered; he had no idea why; but a vision had suddenly crossed her mind of Madame von Waldorf's house at Schlossberg, of the dining-room with its long windows opening on to the terrace, of the fresh and decorated dinner-table, dazzling with polished glass and silver and fine linen. Elisabeth had perfectly simple tastes; it could never have entered her head that the difference between her surroundings and those of her sister-in-law was a hardship; but even in those first hours of exaltation after her arrival in her new home, the dinginess of her dining parlor had struck a chill through her; it seemed horrible to her now that she should offer no better entertainment to her husband's cousin than this sorry feast. The niggardly parsimony of her establishment, to which loyalty to her husband and an absence of self-assertion on her own account had, in a sense, reconciled her, seemed to stare her in the face as they approached the supper-table. The plated spoons and forks, the knives, the common heavy tumblers—all were dim and dingy beyond the power of polishing. Nothing looked fresh but the table linen; that at least, so far as whiteness went, was within her own command.

The Vicar of Thornton Briars was quite undisturbed by the sentiments that were agitating his wife. "Let us say grace," he said, leaning forward a little, both hands on the table; and performed that ceremony. "We are plain people—plain people," he repeated, as he slowly seated himself and unfolded his napkin; "our friends need to take us as they find us. My dear," perceiving the dish that had been placed in front of him, "this is a very extraordinary pie. May I inquire where it came from?"

"It looks like one of Mrs. Dawson's pies," said Miss Dulcie, with a small suppressed laugh.

"It is one of Mrs. Dawson's," said Elisabeth, simply, blushing, but retaining her self-possession in this extremity.

"Well, let us hope it will be good," said her husband, contemplating it with a somewhat disturbed countenance. So vast a pie, it seemed to him, must necessarily be a disturbing element in the weekly expenses that he kept in his own hands. In a moment he rallied, however. "I hope it will prove good," he said, putting a knife into it. "Dulcie, let me give you some."

"No, thank you," said Miss Dulcie, with a turn of the head; "I know what Mrs. Dawson's pies are; I prefer an egg."

Mr. Holland passed the plate to his cousin.

"You have perhaps more courage," he said. "You must excuse all deficiencies in an establishment like this. My wife is not much of a housekeeper, I am afraid; we are so little at home that she has not much practice."

Elisabeth was aroused by this attack to a spirit she did not always show. "Mr. Temple will excuse all deficiencies, I feel sure," she said, gently, looking at her guest and smiling a little. Gordon, looking at her in return, noticed for the first time the direct and honest expression of her beautiful eyes; he noticed also, not for the first time in these last few hours, that she looked charming. She had found time in the five minutes before supper to change her gray dress for a white muslin gown with loose muslin frills—a very old gown that had been washed many times, and mended not a few; but these were facts beyond Gordon's perception. He merely saw that it suited her; that although she was naturally pale, she looked well in white. Not even the crude light of the unshaded petroleum lamp (the harsh smell of the cheap petroleum pervaded the supper-table) could destroy the tender youthful tints of her complexion, and the soft color of her brown hair and eyes. From Elisabeth, Gordon directed his glance to Dulcie Fawcett, who sat facing him; and in this clearer light he found her at once prettier and less pleasing than she had appeared to him in the firelit parlor. She was a trifle sharp-featured, the type of face that in later years may sour to shrewishness; but she had still the roundness of youth, the fresh rose-tints of a girl; and this happy coloring, and the extreme alertness of her small

bright eyes, gave a look of great freshness and animation to her countenance. Her expression and manner were less pleasing; she had the ease and assurance, less of good breeding than of a country girl ignorant of her own deficiencies. She was dressed rather smartly in a sky-blue cashmere with a good deal of white lace about the neck and front. Gordon was naturally ignorant that this fine garment had been put on in his honor; but he could not remain wholly unaware that Miss Dulcie distinguished him by a good deal of attention. As a tolerably modest man, the consciousness that her eyes constantly rested on him when he was not looking in her direction, and were alertly withdrawn when he happened to turn toward her, annoyed him; altogether, for a pretty and attractive-looking young woman, he thought her singularly wanting in charm: she struck him as underbred and pretentious. He wondered how she came to be so much at home at the vicarage; he wondered whether Mrs. Holland, who was another *pâte* altogether, as the Baroness would have said, regarded her with the same eyes as her husband. Mr. Holland, meanwhile, under the cover of generalities, had returned to the subject of his wife's shortcomings.

"Young ladies," he said, "seldom receive what I call a proper practical education in these days. Every young girl, in my opinion, ought to learn before she marries how to market and cook as well as any cook that can be hired. That is the way to keep her husband's house economically; and an unexpected guest will never find her at a loss then. Ten minutes or so will be enough for her to toss up some little dish out of anything or nothing, as one says. To know how to make something out of nothing—that is the way to practise economy; eh, Dulcie?"

"Oh, I love cooking," answered Miss Dulcie' indirectly. "I tell mother sometimes I should like nothing so much as to have a little kitchen all to myself. Only I'm afraid I should spend too much time there; it is so amusing to make little dishes."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Holland, "I don't know that too much time should be devoted to it, though it is a very useful accomplishment—very. My dear, it might be a good plan for you to take a few lessons from Dulcie while we are at home. Nothing is so useful as to know how to turn one's hand to everything."

Elisabeth did not immediately respond, and Gordon, looking at her, perceived that she was watching her hus-

band with a solicitude that caused the admirable truisms he had been uttering with a high didactic purpose to fall upon unheeding ears. Mr. Holland had begun his supper with the avidity of an invalid in whom exhaustion takes the place of appetite; but he almost immediately laid down his knife and fork and pushed away his plate, and was now engaged in mixing himself a tumbler of weak whiskey and water. He passed the bottle across the table to Gordon.

"Excuse my having no wine to offer you, Gordon," he said, with the accent of somewhat frigid ceremony he affected in speaking to his cousin; "but it is forbidden me by the doctors, and there is none in the house."

"Thank you, I prefer whiskey," said Gordon. "This country air of yours gives one a famous appetite, I find," he added, smiling, and looking at Elisabeth.

He looked at Elisabeth, but he looked away again immediately, for her eyes had filled with sudden tears. Something of kindliness, of courtesy in his tone, an accent to which she was not greatly accustomed, moved her strangely. His voice moved her—it moved her greatly. Unheard for three years, it recalled to her, with a vividness quickened by contrast, the Baroness, Emilia, Schlossberg, those far off, sunshiny, foreign days that had once seemed to her to hold in themselves all the possibilities of freedom and joy and wisdom that life can give. To hide her emotion, she leaned forward across the table and addressed her husband.

"Robert," she said quickly, yet with a certain timidity, "will you not try to eat a little more? The doctors—all the doctors say you ought to take more food."

"Ah, the doctors——" said Mr. Holland. "But the doctors don't give me an appetite, my dear; there is not much use in trying to eat without that, I fancy. What do you say, Dulcie? You are a doctor's daughter; you ought to know something about the matter."

"Oh, no, I know very little about all that," said Miss Dulcie, with a laugh. "I am sure, though, I have heard father say that a patient should often be guided entirely by his own sensations. I don't see how one *can* eat when one is not hungry."

"Ah, now, you're a wise girl," said Mr. Holland, leaning back in his chair. "That's what I always say to my wife, but she doesn't believe me. Even this fine country air of ours doesn't give me an appetite. I'm afraid it rather takes it away."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Miss Fawcett; "it makes me think—and I don't want to think it—that you will do right in going away again, and that Venice will be better for you than Thornton Briars. And Venice is such a long way off."

This speech, made in perfect innocence, it may be observed, by Dulcie, produced a very distinct effect on some of the party; since it was at once apparent that, whatever his wife might know of the Vicar's intentions, Miss Dulcie was not uninstructed in the matter. Gordon, glancing at Elisabeth, saw her color a deep red, as though she had been struck; Mr. Holland himself seemed disconcerted.

"My plans," he said with an air of annoyance, "are very uncertain; we will not discuss them at present, my dear. I may probably remain altogether at Thornton Briars."

"Ah, that would be delightful," murmured Dulcie, looking at her plate. An awkward silence fell, presently broken by Gordon, who exerted himself to keep up some semblance of a conversation until the close of supper. The dreary meal ended—he thought, in his heart, he had never assisted at a drearier—Elisabeth, accompanied by Dulcie, rose to leave the room. Gordon prepared to follow them; but perceiving that his host had kept his seat, he returned to the table after the ladies had disappeared. He was at a loss to imagine why his cousin should desire to prolong so dismal a festivity. Mr. Holland lost no time in enlightening him.

"I suppose, Gordon," he said at once, in his deliberate tones, "you have come down here about that money."

"Not in the least," said Gordon, with some heat. "Nothing was further from my thoughts. I came to see how you are getting on. We were all anxious to know."

"You are very good," said Mr. Holland, frigidly. "As regards the money," he continued, "we agreed, you will remember, on an interest of two and a half per cent. That has gone on accumulating——"

"Oh, hang the money!" said Gordon, impatiently. "I beg your pardon, Robert, but what do I care for your two-penny-halfpenny interest? I'm not a Jew; and it was your arrangement, not mine. Let the whole thing be, my good fellow; consider the money paid, settled, done with forever. I will give you a receipt in full this moment, if you please."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Holland, rejecting the imaginary receipt with a wave of the hand. "The interest is

there, awaiting your pleasure; and as regards the money, your tone, Gordon, is singularly at variance with what it was when you last spoke to me on the subject three years ago."

The young man grew extremely red. "I beg your pardon, Robert," he said; "nothing could be further from my intention than to dun you then, or at any other time. But the fact is, that three years ago I was as hard up as a man can well be, and if you had found it convenient to pay me, I should have been glad; that was all. The case is different now; for heaven's sake, let us consider the thing settled, and say no more about it."

Mr. Holland paid no attention to the last remark. "It would be possible—it would be possible," he repeated, emphasizing the last word, "for me to repay you now, but only by withdrawing the money from some valuable investments, where it is desirable it should be left somewhat longer. I can, of course, do so, should you desire it."

"I have already expressed my wish in the matter," said Gordon, curtly.

"In my state of health," Mr. Holland continued, "I am necessarily obliged to consider certain contingencies. It is within my contemplation that I may have to resign a more considerable portion than at present of the income I derive from my living. Under these circumstances, I consider it wise to practise a system of rigid economy for the present, with the view of purchasing, within the next few years, an annuity that would set me more at ease."

"That's rather uncomfortable, isn't it?" said Gordon, "for yourself and your wife, too."

"My wife has her own fortune," said Mr. Holland, distantly; "and while I live, she will, of course, profit by the annuity."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking so much of—of possible contingencies," said Gordon, "as of the rigid economy you speak of in the present. That sounds rather an uncomfortable way of living."

"Ah!—of that you must allow me to be the best judge," said Mr. Holland, slowly rising. "As regards the money, then, we will leave it as it is for the present; the interest, you can, of course, draw whenever you think proper. We had better, I believe, go into the other room now, this one feels rather chilly; the fire is out, I see."

The drawing-room presented a silent aspect. Elisabeth was working on one side of the table; Miss Fawcett, on

the other, was turning over the pages of the German Review. She at once addressed herself to Gordon.

"How much you must know!" she said; "and how clever you must be! I have just been looking at what is said of you in this article—I understand German pretty well, you know, though I *have* only studied it at school—I never met anyone so learned before. In a quiet little place like this one doesn't often come across clever people, and I take so much interest in all these subjects that you know so much about. How I wish you would explain to me everything I don't understand."

"That would be a delightful task," said Gordon, smiling. "I can imagine nothing that would give me greater pleasure."

"How good of you to say so!" said Miss Dulcie; "though I'm afraid you don't know what you are undertaking. You have no idea how much we are behind the world here in such matters. Isn't that true?" she said, appealing to Elisabeth.

Elisabeth did not immediately respond. "I didn't know——" she began and stopped. "I was not aware," she went on, after a moment's hesitation, "that you cared so much about them."

Miss Fawcett opened her eyes, and gave a small, cheerful laugh. "Oh," she said, "that is because we see so little of each other. And I am going away now, for Mr. Holland, I am sure, is tired. It was so kind of you to ask me to come in."

She looked, as she spoke, toward the master of the house, who had thrown himself into his big armchair by the fire. He roused himself at the remark, and held out his hand without rising.

"My dear," he said, "it is always a pleasure to see any one so kind and so thoughtful as you are. You will excuse me, Gordon; but I am an invalid, you know, and have to keep invalid hours. Perhaps you will see Miss Fawcett home."

"I shall be delighted," said Gordon, glancing at the young girl. "Let us hope," he said, "that the walk will be long enough for all those explanations we were speaking of." He turned to Elisabeth, who had risen, and was standing with one hand on the mantelpiece. "Good-night, Mrs. Holland," he said, in a different tone.

Elisabeth was looking at her husband, but she turned her head when he spoke, and her eyes met his with a sad-

ness in them that touched him the more that she was, as he perceived, preoccupied and hardly conscious of her action as she shook hands. She accompanied Dulcie, however, into the vestibule, and duly saw to her hat and shawl, receiving in return a cheerful farewell from the young lady as she sallied forth with her escort into the spring night. Gordon suspected her of a strong disposition to flirt with him ; but if such a desire were in truth animating her, it was not immediately gratified. Gordon's first words related to Mr. Holland.

"My cousin looks very ill," he said. "You, who, as I gather, see a good deal of him——"

"Yes, I see a good deal of Mr. Holland," said his companion. "I am very fond of parish work, you know, and I am glad to be of some little help and comfort to him. There is so much in a parish that only a lady can see to properly. I don't say it is the occupation I always prefer ; I should often be glad to give more time to study. Still, under present circumstances, it seems to fall to me, and the work that comes to one's hand is always the best worth doing. That is the view I take, at any rate."

"Those are most admirable sentiments," said Gordon ; "and my cousin is much to be congratulated on having so willing and efficient a helper. I was going to ask you, who see a good deal of him, what you think of his chances of ultimate recovery. It is a question one can hardly put plainly to his wife."

"To his wife ?" cried Dulcie. She checked herself, however, in what she was about to say, and went on in a quieter tone. "We have never doubted," she said, "of Mr. Holland's ultimate recovery ; I mean, there is no reason that he should not recover ; that is what my father always says—he is his doctor here, you know. He has been ill a long time now, but I don't know that he gets much worse. It would be dreadful," she said, with something of genuine emotion in her voice, "to think that he would not recover."

The emotion surprised Gordon. He had been displeased by the girl's manner, and had not expected any show of feeling on her part. He spoke again in a kindlier tone.

"My cousin, I have always understood," he said, "is very much beloved in his parish ?"

"Yes," she answered, applying a handkerchief to her eyes for a moment. "His marriage is the only thing he has done that has ever displeased us."

"His marriage!" cried Gordon. "That is a criticism ——" he broke off. "I should have thought," he said, "that is a matter that concerns himself and his wife alone. It can hardly have affected his relations to his parishioners."

"Oh, you don't know—you don't know!" said the young girl; "you don't know what a difference it has made to us all. If he had married a wife worthy of him, capable of understanding him, and entering into all his efforts—a really superior woman, able to take the lead in the parish, as the Vicar's wife ought—why, then, whatever difference there were would be all in the right direction. But Mrs. Holland could never take the lead; why, she understands nothing! And what is more, we cannot pretend to understand her."

"Her long absence from the parish——" began Gordon; but he broke off again. Nothing, he immediately perceived, could concern him less than to defend Elisabeth. The sadness of her eyes, that haunted him, seemed a protest against a defence that would imply a possibility of blame. He had seen her, virtually, for the first time that afternoon; he knew her life through mere glimpses. But he was a man easily impressed; she had impressed him greatly; and his companion's words seemed, by a leap as it were, to *place* her in his imagination. He changed the subject abruptly by remarking on the beauty of the night; and Miss Dulcie's prompt response, inquiring whether the stars here were the same as those he had seen in the East, led to a conversation that enabled him to ascertain something of the extent of her talent for flirtation, which he had judged beforehand to be large. He had not been mistaken he found; and by the end of the walk he had gone further; he judged that, with time and experience and a more subtle cultivation of her talent than opportunity had yet afforded in her remote country life, she might become a somewhat dangerous little person. There was nothing subtle about Miss Fawcett so far; a note of exaggeration, of a certain commonness of mind, sounded in almost everything she said. She had offended Gordon's temper and taste by this crudeness of tone, and by her attitude that evening toward his cousin's wife; she had provoked, accordingly, a more critical judgment than would, perhaps, be naturally awarded to a sweet-voiced young woman of considerable personal charms; but such was, at any rate, the final impression left by Miss Dulcie on his mind.

Elisabeth, meanwhile, having seen the hall-door close upon her guests, went back to the sitting-room. Her husband was seated as she had left him; his feet stretched out toward the fire, his hands spread out on the arms of the chair, his eyes closed. He was much feebler in every way than in the old days at Schlossberg. Elisabeth, who had never been separated from him for a day since, and who had seen him rally from more than one alarming attack of illness, hardly understood how much feebler he was. She came in softly now, thinking he was asleep—he had the invalid habit of falling readily into a doze—and sitting down by the table, she took up again the volume of "The Pirate" she was engaged in reading. And she was still so young, she had such a passion of imagination unfed, uncared for, in her daily life, that in five minutes she had almost forgotten herself and her cares in the wild beating of the storm-driven waves on the ultimate shores of Thule. She was roused by her husband's voice.

"My dear," he said, "I am exceedingly fatigued. If you will ring for Jane, we will have prayers at once."

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Elisabeth, starting and closing her book; "as it was not late, I sent Jane out on an errand, to the village; but she will be back in a few minutes, if you don't mind waiting."

Mr. Holland made no answer. It was Elisabeth who first spoke again.

"I suppose," she said, with the accent of timidity that sometimes made itself heard when she addressed her husband, "you are too tired to-night to look over the week's accounts: it will be better to leave them till Monday."

"Yes; that will be better," he answered, closing his eyes again. In a moment he re-opened them. "I was speaking to Dulcie to-day, my dear, about the butcher's bill; and she tells me, as I felt sure must be the case, that it is excessive, and that he must certainly cut the meat very wastefully for so much to be consumed in a small household like ours."

"Dulcie cannot know!" said Elisabeth, impetuously; "and I wish—I wish, if you don't mind, that you wouldn't consult her about our bills."

"She cannot know—why cannot she know?" said Mr. Holland.

"Because she doesn't keep our house," said Elisabeth, simply; "nor do I believe that she knows much about

housekeeping. In any case, she cannot know how much meat we need during the week."

"You are wrong, my dear—altogether wrong. Dulcie knows a great deal about housekeeping. She often keeps house at home."

"Oh, she says so—she says so!" began Elisabeth. She took up her work, and set a few hasty stitches. "Dulcie says so many things," she went on, letting the work fall into her lap again; "she says that she is so fond of parish work, but it is only when you are here——" she broke off.

Mr. Holland did not immediately answer.

"My dear," he said at last, without looking at her, "I should recommend you, when you have half an hour to yourself, to devote it to studying the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians."

Elisabeth colored extremely, but said nothing.

"And on Monday," her husband continued in the same tone, "I will look over the butcher's biil since our return, and see where a reduction can be effected. I think it probable that the beef-tea I have been taking twice a day may account for a good deal of the expenditure, but I am thinking of giving that up. I am thoroughly tired of it; and that being the case, I doubt that it does me more harm than good,"

"No, Robert," said Elisabeth, leaning forward with the most anxious solicitude; "don't give it up; you know it is almost the only real nourishment you take. If you think our weekly expenses too high—I don't think they are very high, really—I will go without meat. I am strong; it won't hurt me; I will try to be more economical. Only don't give up your beef-tea."

"Allow me to be the judge, my dear," said her husband, without moving. "I shall probably give it up."

He closed his eyes again. Elisabeth sat gazing before her, feeling, not for the first time, that to talk with her husband in certain moods was to find herself in an *impasse*, to run against a dead wall, that she, at any rate, was powerless to shake. The perception was always intolerable to her; she could not sit still under it; there had been times when she had felt that she would like to fling herself against it with both fists, as it were, and beat it down. To-night she rushed for relief into another subject, reckless that she could not have chosen a worse moment to introduce it.

"Do you think——" she began, nervously, then gathered courage. "Do you think," she said, "you will accept your brother Otto's offer?"

"I really cannot say," Mr. Holland answered, with the most chilling indifference. "Perhaps; I have not sufficiently considered the subject."

"It might do you good," said Elisabeth. "I think it would, if we could go soon, before the east winds begin here. Don't you think so?" She paused, but her husband made no reply. A vision of Venice opened before her, the unseen Venice of her dreams, domed and walled with white marble, winged with sails, shimmering and reflected in transparent wave and light. And it was there for them to take or to leave! "Do consider it, Robert," she said. "I mean, of course, if the doctor should approve; I think he would. We should have the house for nothing, you know."

"That would be a consideration with you?" said Mr. Holland; "I should not expect it to affect you greatly."

"I don't know," said Elisabeth, drawing back and flushing at his tone; "but I should have imagined it one that would have importance with you."

Mr. Holland looked at her, and then again at the fire. "Certainly," he said slowly, "it has very great importance. My dear, will you be good enough to ring the bell? I heard Jane come in a minute ago, and I am too much fatigued to talk any more to-night."

Elisabeth rose, and first ringing the bell, fetched a Bible and Prayer-book and placed them on a small table that she moved to her husband's side. The maid came in; Mr. Holland read a psalm and two or three collects in the somewhat monotonous, sing-song voice he affected in reading the Church Service. It is to be hoped that Elisabeth profited by this spiritual sustenance; for, of all that rich spiritual feast to which she had once looked forward, this spare and frugal remnant was all that was left to her.

Possibly she did profit by it; at any rate, she approached her husband at its close in a different mood. He bent forward to kiss her forehead.

"Good-night, my dear," he said.

Elisabeth took his hand in both hers. The tone of their late discussion was hateful to her; she felt an uncontrollable need for one touch of warmth and reconciliation. "Forgive me, Robert," she said, pleadingly.

"For what?" he said, with a sort of cold languor. He

dropped her hands and turned to leave the room, moving to the door with so slow and feeble a step that every other sentiment in Elisabeth's heart was swallowed up in great and tender pity. She went a step forward, her eyes dilating at that pathetic spectacle of the weakness of a strongly-built man—a spectacle to which she was accustomed, indeed, but which now and again forced itself newly on her attention ; but she went no farther than that one step. Her husband, as she knew, disliked that she should proffer her help ; he rejected it always. She watched him leave the room, and listened to his slow step as he crossed the hall and ascended the stair ; she heard him pause and give some orders to Jane ; then a door closed above. Elisabeth quitted her motionless attitude, and droping into her chair, took up her book again. She had the habit of reading one book or another at night, after her husband had left her. But to-night she could not read. Now that she was alone, and could trust herself to think, thought came in a torrent. Gordon Temple's visit had stirred up some of her closest, her most sacred memories. With a sudden burst of tears, her thoughts flew back to three years ago, and to Schlossberg.

CHAPTER XXV.

A RETROSPECT.

It was not that Schlossberg was strange to the thoughts in these days. On the contrary, her stay there had been an episode so momentous in her life that no memory of her life assailed her so keenly, or held her so closely. As a rule, however, she put it aside ; nay, she kept it at arm's length. But to-night ! For three years no voice had reached her ears, no face crossed her vision, of those whom she had known there ; and though, of all whom she had known, Gordon Temple had been the least seen, the least regarded, she felt now as if he had been associated with every hour of her stay. O God ! those early days at Schlossberg ; her spacious, dusky attic, her wide sunset view, filled with a never-ending procession of dreams ; her books, her classes, her short-lived sense of freedom. Deep sobs, wrung from her by the piercing sweetness of the memory of the happiest days she had ever known, shook

Elisabeth's whole frame ; but in a minute she forced them back. The strongest habit of her present life was the repression of all strong emotion. She forced back her sobs ; and though her tears continued to flow for a while, they also presently ceased. For her, too, as for everyone, practical life had claims superior to those of any memories, however poignant. Her tears ceased to flow, and in a moment she remembered that it was Saturday night, that it was still early, and that she had the week's mending on her hands. Red-eyed she rose from her seat, and going softly to the kitchen desired Jane to bring her the basket of household linen for the next week's wash, that she might see what sheets and tablecloths required darning. Elisabeth's unwilling needle, which, however, was by no means an unskilful one, had acquired dexterity through plenty of practice in these last years ; but that, beyond a certain tedium, modified by books, was no special grievance to her. She had the satisfaction of feeling that she was fulfilling a duty, and a duty so much easier than some others that fell to her share, that it even afforded her a sort of pleasure. She did not like a tablecloth full of darns ; but at least it might be set down on the right side of her account that it was not full of holes. In that direction, at any rate, her conscience might be at rest ; and Elisabeth had travelled wide oceans and deserts, indeed, since the time when the liveliest reproach her conscience afforded her was, that she could find nothing to reproach herself with. She did little else than repent now, poor child, with the dreariest sense that repentance was of no avail, since it changed nothing. She did not formulate it ; she would formulate nothing that could give a more definite shape to the unhappiness of her life ; but deep in her heart lay the conviction that, though human effort may modify, it can never change the conditions, the unalterable conditions of human nature, and that the sorriest tragedy of life lies in the miserable sense of wrong that attends the clashing of two incompatible and irreconcilable human wills.

Elisabeth, I say, would formulate nothing. She did not love disillusions ; it would have seemed to her that life might as well end at once, as that she should deliberately strip away all those fine-woven golden mists and veils with which she had beforehand invested her married life. Happily—or unhappily—to a nature such as hers, at once loyal and self-diffident, disillusion comes very

slowly. Those fine-woven veils may be eaten through and through, and yet for years retain something of their pristine hue and texture, till, through some rougher touch than usual, they all at once fall to dust. Elisabeth, like many other young girls, had married, inspired by an immense egotism; though it may be conceded that in her the egotism lay not too far removed from a virtue. It never occurred to her that she herself could be of much importance in Mr. Holland's life; she was too young and ignorant. To sit at his feet and imbibe wisdom, to receive everything and give nothing in return but an adoring gratitude, that had seemed to her the only possible position for each to occupy toward the other. When she began to discover that Mr. Holland had other ideas—it is so naturally annoying to a man to be expected to deliver himself of the spiritual wisdom of the ages, when he is chiefly concerned to ascertain where half-a-crown can be saved in the weekly expenditure, that she was not long in making the discovery—she reproached herself with being too exacting. It puzzled her not a little, since she seemed to herself precisely the same as before her marriage, when Mr. Holland had been a perfect storehouse of wisdom for her benefit; still, it never could occur to her for a moment that she had been mistaken in her estimate of his character; and when she first became aware, as she very soon did, that her married life was going to be something quite different from what she had anticipated, she was prompt to lay the blame entirely on herself. That was a point of view she had never yet consciously abandoned, though how far she had slipped from it she might have judged, had she chosen to measure by such a flash of memory as had visited her to-night, the distance that divided Mr. Holland as she had imagined him at the Pension Werner, and her husband as she knew him after an acquaintance of three years. Elisabeth had no desire to measure that distance; to judge her husband might be to find him altogether wanting; and what would then be left to her in life? To be loyal to him in thought and word—that was the passionate ideal to which, in the sad wreck of some other ideals, Elisabeth ardently clung. And was he not, after all, very much what she had imagined? Religious, earnest, hard-working, and pathetically good in his resignation to the heavy burthen of his long illness. "My dear, it is the Will of God; He knows what is best for us; it is not for us to murmur, but to submit;" that was all the answer that he

had ever made when, in the early days of their married life, she had been disposed to rebel on his account. These were not mere phrases, as she knew; they expressed the deep conviction by which he lived. Surely he was good —only not faultless—no, not faultless. . . .

Madame von Waldorf had said truly, in her letter to Gordon, that she and her brother's wife had remained apart. A tumult of contradiction existed in Elisabeth's mind in regard to Emilia. She loved her, and she had learned to love her in Schlossberg; that in itself laid an eternal claim on her affection; and yet there were times when she would have liked never to hear or think of her again, for she was connected with a stinging memory. When her words, unheeded at the time, "He thinks a good deal about money," first recurred to Elisabeth, no empty husk, as they had seemed at first, but weighty with meaning, she felt as though some malignant demon were waving a horrid torch to illuminate and interpret half her life. In vain she shut her eyes; the light was there; it was Emilia's hand that had kindled it; and there were times when Elisabeth felt that she would rather die than let Madame von Waldorf give one glance below the surface of her married life. It was not for many months after that life had begun that perception and memory dawned upon her. Mr. Holland's economical habits did not trouble her in the least at first; her whole training and education had induced simple tastes. She was a little Puritan in such matters, like many another English girl; luxury, the idea even of luxury, as connected with herself, was foreign to her; she would have thought it wrong. She had, indeed, a woman's love of pretty gowns; she had, as we know, no more disinclination than any other young girl to rehearse her small vanities before a looking-glass. But when her husband told her gravely that vanities of any kind were unbecoming in a clergyman's wife, and the Apostle's injunction as to simplicity of attire were more especially incumbent upon her, the good child believed him implicitly, and did her best to obey. In the same way, when he instructed her that the narrowness of their income compelled the rigid consideration of every penny before it was spent, she accepted the statement in entire faith. She hardly knew what their income was; she knew nothing of what things cost. She had a schoolgirl's ignorance in such matters; and winged with eagerness to meet her husband's slightest wish, she outstripped

him at first in ingenious thrift; she had small triumphs of economy that she detailed to him with pride, to win an approving smile. Only by degrees—only by degrees, through the closer acquaintance with her husband's character, through the wider acquaintance with the world that her married life necessarily entailed, did she come to understand that whatever an income might be—their own, she presently learned, was a liberal one for a man of her husband's profession—its limits need not necessitate a continual wrangling with tradesmen, with porters, with servants, an incessant effort to turn the balance of profit in one's own favor; that sordidness is one thing, economy another; and that, even though circumstances exclude generosity, they need not admit meanness. Only by degrees, I say, by commerce with the world, by passing remarks overheard, by her own growing impatience over the eternal question of farthings, did Elisabeth begin to connect the above excellent truisms with her husband's conduct of life. She only realized the connection on the day when, like the sting of some noxious reptile, Emilia's words returned to her mind.

She compounded the matter after the fashion of mortals. She had thought her husband faultless; well, he was not faultless. On the contrary, he had a fault that exasperated her to a degree that left her no choice, if life was to be tolerable, but to accept it unhesitatingly for herself, and to ignore it, whenever she could not remedy it, for others. For herself, as has been said, she cared little as a rule, though it had had one result that was odious to her—the selection by her husband of a cheap boarding-house at Westport in which to pass their winters. Elisabeth wondered sometimes why a cheap English boarding-house should affect her so differently, should seem so much more detestable than good Frau Werner's pension at Schlossberg, which was certainly not remarkable for the choice neatness of its appointments; but so it was. There was a certain cracked water-jug in her bedroom there, a certain cheap painted washing-stand with half its paint rubbed off, a certain spotted and tarnished mirror, that made all life seem squalid. The water-jug she did manage to replace in time; but the washing-stand and the looking-glass—they returned year after year to the same rooms—remained to afflict her to the end. This, I say, was an odious result, and twice she had remonstrated with Mr. Holland on the subject, but no more. At the time that

we meet her again, it was months since she had remonstrated with her husband on any point except when her hot young blood drove her to utter words she always repented of afterward. Elisabeth, it may be noted, had ceased to think of herself as apathetic; on the contrary, she was frightened by the capacity for passion that she had discovered in herself; that was not the result she had anticipated in marrying the Vicar of Thornton Briars!

Mr. Holland, on his side, had not been without his disillusions also. Seeing in Elisabeth, to start with, only one of those adoring young creatures with whom his pastoral office had made him familiar, he figured to himself beforehand a wife whose leading quality would remain unlimited adoration (adorned by general usefulness and three hundred a year), and whose insignificant remnant of character he would be able to mould as he pleased. Had he been able to live at home in his own parish, his dream might in part have been fulfilled; he would at least have been in an atmosphere favorable to its fulfilment. Listening, Sunday after Sunday, to her husband's eloquent sermons, learning to help him in his devoted pastoral work, Elisabeth might long have retained that attitude of worship dear to every devout and enthusiastic young soul. But the life he was actually compelled to lead, the incidents of travel, the contact with strangers, those hundred accidents that have the pernicious trick of dislocating a character and revealing all its weakest points, had proved fatal to Mr. Holland's scheme. He had forgotten to reckon with his wife's intelligence. It had possibly never occurred to him that she had any particular intelligence apart from her appreciation of himself; he had certainly not reckoned—and there he was the less to blame that Elisabeth herself was ignorant of it—with his wife's independence of character. The first time she ventured to assert herself in opposition to him, he was confounded; but he reproved her and forgot it as an isolated incident not likely to recur. But the incident occurred again and again, till Mr. Holland discovered to his dismay that his wife had a capacity for contemplating and judging him altogether apart from his own point of view. The discovery was an exceedingly unpleasant one. It would be hardly too much to say that from the moment he made it his somewhat tepid affection for the young girl whom he had married passed into an indifference that only a sense of duty, and that languor of ill-health that deadened

all his sensations, kept from passing into a more active dislike. To find a clear-eyed wife, in short, in the place of an unquestioning worshipper, occasioned him a discomfort so keen, that he may be excused, perhaps, if it engaged him in some resentment toward Elisabeth. It need hardly, however, be said that he expressed no resentment. He simply took up a line of conduct that should relieve him, as far as possible, of criticism. He affected to treat his wife as a child, whose judgment was not worth considering. By degrees, through no very fixed scheme on his part, rather through the exercise of the law that accelerates mechanically, as it were, any alienation once started between two human beings, he altogether withdrew from her his confidence, except in the most trivial matters, simply communicating to her such decisions as he finally came to—decisions from which, as she soon came to learn, there was no appeal so far as she was concerned.

The situation was one not without precedent; but it is not always that a husband can suppress a wife whose point of view is becoming inconvenient to him, with the success that, on the whole, attended Mr. Holland's efforts. He was favored in this case, at any rate, by the happiest circumstances, and by Elisabeth's own temperament. She had an ideal far up in the clouds of what a clergyman's wife in general, and Mr. Holland's in particular, ought to be; but she had not an idea of practically asserting herself in that position; her extreme diffidence stood in her way; nor, from the beginning, did it occur to her husband to lend her much assistance. When he first took her home to Thornton Briars, Elisabeth found herself in an atmosphere which, if not absolutely unfriendly, was a trifle chilling to a shy young girl in whom the first rudiments of self-confidence, taught by experience of the world, were wanting. The vicar's marriage had been disapproved of in the parish; no one wished to see a young girl fresh from the schoolroom filling the important position of mistress of the vicarage; or, if the position was to be so filled, more than one young lady within a stone's throw of the vicarage had claim to promotion that the vicar would have done well to recognize. Had my heroine been other than she was, had she, in truth, been everything she was not, self-confident, that is to say, brisk, sociable, energetic in making friends, instead of the Elisabeth we know, she might, without too much difficulty, have overcome the prejudice that awaited her.

As it was, while Mr. Holland on his return found himself welcomed back with unfeigned joy into a familiar atmosphere of affection, appreciation, and admiration—it need hardly be said that the disapproval felt at his marriage fell wholly on his wife, not on himself—while he found himself, I say, basking in this warm familiar sunshine of approval, which only the vagaries of churchwardens and the occasional blundering of a curate kept from being too ecstatic for this lower world, Elisabeth felt herself a little left out in the cold. She was like a stranger not wanted in a party of old friends who knew each other's ways and catchwords — ways that often seemed strange enough to her—and no one took her by the hand. It was not that the people at Thornton Briars were unkindly; they were very much like other human beings, and there is a good deal of kindness always, as well as of selfishness, in human nature; but a young and newly-married wife may well be supposed to be an object to her husband of such solicitude as excludes any claim upon the outer world. This was especially felt at Thornton Briars; Mr. Holland's wife was a person so highly, so exceptionally privileged, that to show her too much favor would be to add to the injustice of fortune that had already enriched her beyond her merits. If she did not consider herself the happiest of mortals, she ought to do so! Their part was to welcome Mr. Holland among them again; to make him feel that, unless he desired it, his marriage should make no difference. Apparently he did not desire it; it was delightful to see how unchanged he was; there were moments when it might almost be forgotten that he had a wife at all. It was impossible for Elisabeth to feel herself of any great importance in the parish of Thornton Briars.

I feel that I am exposing my heroine to the sad accusation that her unpopularity was entirely her own fault when I say that matters were little better at the seaside boarding-house, whither they adjourned for the winter. I would immediately add, therefore, that in the little society that presently gathered about them from among the residents of the town, more than one kind and motherly woman was found who, sincerely pitying the young wife with her sickly husband, took the girl under her protection, and cheered her life to a degree that won from her the warmest gratitude. These kindly people made the social conditions of the dull little winter watering-place more tolerable to her; the company she was obliged to associate

with in the boarding-house she found intolerable to the end ; and the first shock her allegiance to her husband received was perhaps through the discovery that he was not only resigned to, but found positive entertainment in the vapid gossip, puerile to the point of vulgarity, that formed the staple of conversation at the dinner-table and in the public sitting-room. Alas, for the spacious dusky attic, with its far historic view peopled by a procession of dreams ! Elisabeth had no such refuge now. She could only take her book and read as well as her impatience would permit her, whilst the empty chatter that she was too young to accept cynically, too unphilosophical to take with calmness, went on. There were three old maids, there were too horrible Anglo-Indian women of doubtful antecedents—Elisabeth could never afterward recall them without a shudder—who had the habit of surrounding her husband after dinner, of overwhelming him with *petits soins.* And he liked it ; merciful heavens, he liked it ! Elisabeth used to retreat into the furthest corner of the room, and her eyes fixed on her book, close ears and attention as much as possible. And since it is impossible to imagine that such company should please the reader any better than it pleased Elisabeth, I am glad not to be compelled to linger over this portion of my heroine's history. But it is not surprising that neither at Westport could she feel herself a person of great social importance.

At the time of Mr. Holland's visit to Thornton Briars, after his marriage—a visit of some two months only before he moved to winter quarters—Miss Dulcie Fawcett was not at home ; she was engaged in finishing her education at the superior boarding-school of a neighboring town. It was in the following summer that Elisabeth made the acquaintance of a young lady who was destined to have some influence on her future. At first the two girls—Dulcie was the younger by some six months or so—attained to a certain degree of intimacy. Miss Fawcett was delighted to patronize the vicar's wife, and our forlorn Elisabeth, profoundly ignorant of parish matters, unwilling to harass her husband by her ignorance, and diffident of consulting the one or two energetic ladies who, with the curate, ruled in Mr. Holland's absence—Elisabeth was not unwilling to be patronized. It may be stated at once, however, that Miss Dulcie Fawcett was not a person to inspire continued confidence ; she had, as one of her school-fellows graphically expressed it, the habit of kissing one before

one's face, and pinching one behind one's back ; she had, moreover, that particular adaptability which confers so much grace in public, that it can only be a matter for regret that in private life it should occasionally rouse the most uncharitable feelings. Elisabeth, where her affections were not concerned, was gifted with one of the least gracious powers with which the genius of truth can endow a mortal, the power of detecting the slightest shade of pretension at a glance ; and she had known Dulcie Fawcett but a very brief period before discovering an extremely vacant and hollow background to that young lady's professions and enthusiasms. In one direction only could Elisabeth find any very genuine feeling to correspond with her facile expressions, and that was in the devotion professed by Miss Dulcie for the vicar. She had, it presently appeared, when she was a little tired of patronizing Elisabeth, an affection and admiration for Mr. Holland that caused the prevailing sentiment at Thornton Briars, that Mrs. Holland was at once an inconvenient and insignificant accident, to take a very acute form. She ceased to patronize ; she did her best, whilst resuming her old relations with the vicar, to ignore his wife ; and she had only to assume this attitude to make Elisabeth, whose relations with her husband were already a little strained, very helpless. Dulcie had lived in the parish all her life ; she knew all about everyone ; she had always been a particular favorite with the vicar—that was a privilege and an honor she saw no reason whatever for resigning—he had known her since she was a child, he had prepared her for Confirmation, he had advised her in her duties. It was easy, it was natural, to place in her instructed hands certain club accounts, clothing-society books, and other matters, that in the natural order of things would have fallen under his wife's superintendence. Elisabeth had hoped to learn of Dulcie, who seemed to her to have a sufficient acquaintance with parish business ; but when she perceived that Miss Fawcett had no intention of resigning the superiority lent to her by superior knowledge, she was incapable of fighting a battle on the subject. She was withheld by the dread of harassing her husband with a petty woman's quarrel ; and presently by an abyss that opened before her in the possibility that, in some such miserable strife, it might not be her part that he would take. She resigned herself, therefore, and the more easily that their long absences from the parish opened a way for her to do so ; but

it would be vain to deny that her sentiments toward Dulcie Fawcett were, as a fact, by no means in harmony with those precepts of St. Paul to which her husband had directed her attention. A passion of resentment, on the contrary, possessed her at times. And yet it was not altogether common jealousy that moved her to such heat; it was rather the unspoken, unrecognized conviction that she had been a fool—a fool. In her husband and Miss Fawcett she seemed to see a sort of travesty of what she herself had been to him; of what, before their marriage, he had been to herself. Those words and tones and looks, the kindly interest, the grave solicitude, that had once seemed to single her out from all the world to supreme distinction, to justify to herself an interest in herself beyond any other created being, she saw them all addressed to Dulcie; as in the young girl's reception of them she seemed to see some horrible, mocking reflection of herself. Elisabeth, I say, indulged in no vulgar conception of the situation; she was loyal to her husband; she was even clear-sighted enough—so far had married life cleared her vision—to perceive that his manner to Dulcie meant no more than his manner to half the women, young and old, in his parish; only emphasized a little, perhaps, by an old and kindly partiality. But, in that case, where and who was she herself? Where was the especial place in his regard? Why was she his wife? This tragedy, or comedy, call it which you will, of all her own past relations with Mr. Holland played out before her eyes, with another actress in her own part—the same, all but the *dénouement* —was a sorry enough spectacle to Elisabeth. It was her entertainment throughout each summer, and it taxed her patience and her pride alike. There were times when it exasperated her to the very verge of endurance.

A hope, constantly cherished by Elisabeth, that, on their next return to Thornton Briars, some happy accident might have brought about Miss Fawcett's absence from the scene, was always doomed to disappointment. Dulcie was always there to welcome them; a presence thrown more and more into relief by the growing breach and alienation between her husband and herself. To two points, that might have added to the unhappiness of Elisabeth's life, she had so far remained blind. In the first place, she had no conception, none whatever, that in her husband's past life there lay, covered up and hidden away, a dark hour. No such light as had caused Emilia's unheeded

words to start to her memory had yet fallen on those still more unheeded words she had overheard at the Pension Werner years ago. In the next place, it had never once occurred to her that Mr. Holland had married her for her money. This was sufficiently explained by the fact that he hardly ever spoke of her money at all, and then only to allude to it somewhat slightingly, as if it furnished a motive for economy rather than for expenditure. No; had she set herself to reason on so dreary a matter at all, her reasoning might have led her to conclude that her fortune was too small to affect her husband one way or the other. Had she been able to bring him the wealth of Emilia! she once thought, with a sigh. And yet Mr. Holland, on the rare occasions that he spoke of his sister, alluded, as she had remarked, with singular bitterness to the snares, the vanity, the emptiness of human riches. This was one of those contradictions that no good wife will attempt to explain. Elisabeth, at any rate, set it aside in that private cabinet of disillusions on which she so resolutely turned lock and key, that Pandora's box from which she dared not lift the lid, lest not hope but despair might be lurking at the bottom. And should it be affirmed that Elisabeth was too much of a coward, that the better choice is to confront, not to evade or compound with the ills of life, it can only be answered that she was a coward in fact; but that, after all (if one must excuse her), there are worse forms of cowardice than that which, at the opening of life, shrinks from the conscious desecration of the love and reverence and admiration that make the pure religion of a young soul. Elisabeth did her best to bury her head in the scanty sand of her desert; the feat was an impossible one, but when not too much depressed by failure, she at least fancied herself the better for the effort.

In that month of April in which we meet her again, Elisabeth, finding on her return home with her husband somewhat earlier in the spring than usual—finding Dulcie Fawcett waiting at the vicarage gate to receive them, more energetic, more versatile, more devoted than ever, did feel her heart sink within her. It seemed hard to her, then and later, that all her efforts and patience through the winter—Mr. Holland had been very ill for a time after their return to Westport, and Elisabeth had spent many hours at his bedside in company with the tarnished looking-glass and the squalid washing-stand—it seemed hard to her, I say, that all this should count for nothing appar-

ently in her husband's favor, beside Dulcie's neat parish-books and fluent parish-gossip. It would have greatly surprised Mr. Holland to know that any such comparison had arisen in his wife's mind. She was simply fulfilling her duty in nursing him ; for that, among other reasons, he had married her. And, in fact, this view of the question presently making its way into Elisabeth's mind also, she owned its reasonableness and fell to reproaching herself as usual. Nevertheless. her heart sank at the prospect of the summer before them, and the mere mention of Venice had come to her as salvation ; not only because it was Venice (though that winged word held her like a spell), but because it opened an escape from Thornton Briars and from Dulcie. Elisabeth had been hurt, she had been horribly hurt, by the discovery that her husband had spoken of his plans to Miss Fawcett before mentioning them to her ; but on such a point she was incapable of remonstrating with him. Only a momentary courage, indeed, could have enabled her to bring forward the subject at all. The cold indifference and languor with which her husband habitually met her remarks—the languor of an invalid who does not care to be disturbed by a companion in whose society he feels privileged to be dull—always discouraged her. No word concerning Gordon Temple had passed between them. Elisabeth felt instinctively that his visit, which to her had been like a casement opening from a darkened room upon a sunny breadth of landscape, had been displeasing to her husband. She had not now, however, to learn that he disapproved of his own family ; and, as she reflected on the fact, she began to wish that Gordon Temple had not come. And yet what pleasure, what pain dearer than pleasure, it had given her ! She sat darning her table-cloth by the hard light of the petroleum lamp, whilst a crowd of thoughts passed through her brain. It was on Schlossberg they fastened themselves at last ; Schlossberg was tugging at her heart-strings to-night. To go back there, to find the old days again, her room, her books, Frau Werner, the Sparrows—Elisabeth gave a sort of laugh at the thought of Mary Sparrow. If she could only see her stand there at the door, with her dull, honest face, to utter her dull honest speeches once more ! Elisabeth felt that she loved her for the simple, brutal frankness that knew no guile. Yes ; if she had to choose between Schlossberg and Venice, Schlossberg, she thought (and yet Venice held her as with a spell), would be her choice. But,

as she very well knew, the choice did not lie between Venice and Schlossberg. Schlossberg was the one place to which her husband would never go. If they left Thornton Briars at all, it might probably be to go to Venice! And after all, Venice! Elisabeth folded up the table-cloth she had been mending, replaced it in the basket, and clasping her hands behind her head, stood gazing at the dying embers of the fire. She was indulging, for once, in a splendid and conscious day-dream. But in a moment she shook it off, with a rapid movement of the head; and taking up the basket of linen, she carried it back to the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PIOUS PILGRIMAGE.

About a fortnight later Elisabeth was standing on the little iron-railed balcony of a house in one of the narrower streets that run between the Strand and the Thames Embankment. It was one of those charming English spring days spared by the east wind, that in their temperate sunshine, their sweet and youth-renewing breath, suggest, perhaps, as near an approach to Eden as this much-battered world affords. Even in London the air seemed full of the twitter of birds, the scent of bursting buds and flowers; the sky was blue above the house-tops, the morning sun shone fresh and warm on the dingy bricks. Elisabeth, standing on the sooty balcony, felt, with a strange stirring of the heart, that life was good, that the world was young; that she also was young, that all the possibilities of life might still be hers. It was like one of her Schlossberg days of three years back transplanted into the heart of London. She held a book in her hand, but she was not reading; she was looking down into the street below. There was not much to see. Hard by was the great tumult of the Strand; but only an occasional cart, a rare cab, rattled down this quiet side-thoroughfare. Still, after Westport, after Thornton Briars, she found an interest in the prospect quite out of proportion to its actual merits; that continuous roar of the great city close at hand stirred her blood, I say, to a strange excitement. She was not reading, though her finger kept her place in the volume

she held. The book was "The Stones of Venice," and it had been sent her some few days back by her sister-in-law, Madame von Waldorf, on the part of her old friend, Gordon Temple's father.

"Gordon tells us," Madame von Waldorf wrote, "that there is some idea of your going to Venice, and my uncle immediately begged me to forward you the accompanying volume, in the hope that it will add to your pleasure there, as it did, some years ago, to his. You are also, he says, to write and tell him about everything you see; he knows and loves Venice so well. He even talks of the possibility of getting there this spring, so as to be with Gordon, who has work, he tells us, that may detain him there for some months. I doubt myself that my uncle will be able to bear the journey, though, except for his lameness, he is very well; but the plan pleases him, and we often talk it over. He dreams at night, he says, of being in a gondola once more. Should he really be able to accomplish it, Ida and I should accompany him, and Aunt Irma might probably join us from Vienna; so that if you and Robert were also there, we should be able to meet and see each other in the most delightful way possible. It gives me a great deal of pleasure, dear Lisa, to think of it. Only delightful schemes are too good for this world, I am afraid; they so rarely come to pass! But in any case, if you go to Venice, you may probably find some old Schlossberg friends there. You remember the Sparrows, do you not? And do you remember a funny little cousin of theirs, Miss Robbins, who came out to join them? I never saw her myself; but it appears that she and Frau Werner struck up an immense and sentimental friendship, and when the time arrived for Miss Robbins to go home, vowed, with floods of tears, that they could never part again. Aunt Irma, who, as you know, has always a hundred benevolent schemes on hand, and has a particular kindness for good Frau Werner, was struck with the happy idea of making a partnership between the two, and establishing Frau Werner with a second pension at Venice, to be open during the spring and autumn months. Venice was selected, simply because a party of English, proceeding there after a winter at the Pension Werner, were lamenting the probable necessity of having to put up with less reasonable and less commodious quarters. In ten minutes, so to speak—you know her way—Aunt Irma had arranged the whole business: engaged the second floor of an old palazzo, established

Miss Robbins as temporary head of the Schlossberg pension, and sent off Frau Werner with her party to Venice. This was last year. The scheme has so far answered admirably, and the two pensions continue to flourish. That at Venice was closed during the winter; but Frau Werner started from here last week to reopen it, with various of her *pensionnaires*, among whom, I believe, were the Sparrows; so you may chance to come across those queer people again. This is a long history, dear Elisabeth, but I fancy you retain a friendly interest in the Pension Werner, and it might have surprised you, had you, without warning, suddenly come upon it in the heart of Venice. . . ."

Elisabeth read this letter over her solitary breakfast in the dull mahogany and black horsehair dining-room at the vicarage—the room where the sunshine never came, and the dense laurel hedge outside almost shut out the sky; and as she read, her hear begant to beat at all these high prospects that seemed opening out before her. No; she would not look forward. Emilia was right—such things never came true; and presently, when she gave the letter to her husband to read, she began to wish Emilia had not written at all. It was a week after Gordon Temple's visit, and Elisabeth was still ignorant of Mr. Holland's decision concerning Venice. Possibly he had not come to any; but in the existing relations between himself and his wife she had no means of ascertaining the fact. Nevertheless, certain phrases that had escaped him in the last day or two seemed to point more certainly in the direction of her hopes. "When we leave home," he had said on one occasion; "If I accept my brother's offer," on another. But, as Elisabeth instantly felt, a nipping wind blew on these possibly budding intentions from Madame von Waldorf's letter. He turned it over before reading it, studied the embossed monogram in the corner—it was a trick he had with her letters; Elisabeth knew it so well that she had more than once thought of begging Emilia to write to her on an unstamped sheet—and shook the paper a little, as though to shake off any lingering scent of roses that might cling to it. Then he read it in silence, and in silence meditated on it for a moment.

"If one thing more than another," he said then in his deliberate tones, returning the letter to Elisabeth, "would keep me away from Venice, it would be the prospect of meeting the Schlossberg party there."

Elisabeth's heart sank. "The Sparrows," she said,

after a moment's pause; "they will be there also, you see."

"What has that to do with it?" he answered. "The Sparrows will not shield me from an impertinence both calculated and covert, and from which I have endured more than enough."

"Oh," said Elisabeth, coloring, "I am sure—I am sure that Emilia——"

"We need not discuss the matter," said her husband, interrupting her. "Kindly fetch the prayer-book from that table, my dear, and then you can read the Psalms for the day."

Elisabeth was not altogether in the mood for pious exercises; but reading aloud was one of the few services her husband voluntarily demanded of her, and she willingly complied. This was some ten days ago; and Venice had not again been mentioned between them. As Elisabeth stood on the little balcony this morning, gazing down into the street, she knew nothing of what their next destination was to be; nor did she, to say the truth, for the moment greatly care. They had left Thornton Briars because two days of bitter east wind had so prostrated Mr. Holland that he had been peremptorily ordered by his doctor to seek a milder climate for the next six weeks; and they had come to London because some legal business, involving the signature of certain papers, demanded Elisabeth's presence. Some lodgings, recommended to Mr. Holland as cheap and convenient, had been secured, and for the last five or six days they had been in town. To Elisabeth these days had given some hours of extreme pleasure. To have left Thornton Briars and Dulcie, and not to be at Westport, was in itself an extraordinary relief. Never, since the early months of their marriage, had she had her husband to herself in the same way; and he, she fancied, was more cheerful, more genial to her than he had been for a long time back. Perhaps if they could be alone together for a while, all might yet be well; she might start afresh; she might be able to please him, and lose that dreary sense of being always in the wrong that oppressed her. But apart from this, the mere fact that she was in London was a delight to Elisabeth. She had not been there since her marriage, not since the time when she spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt in Cadogan Place; not since that eventful morning when she sprang from her bed at dawn of day to start on a rapturous journey through an unknown world,

that was to lead to such unlooked-for ends. She had almost forgotten the roar and murmur of the great city, the sensation of miles of human beings on every side; of being, as it were, at the very centre of life, of listening to its multitudinous throb. It moved her strangely; her imagination, half starved on the scanty fare furnished it in these last years, sprang into excitement; she longed to go everywhere—to the parks, to the City, to St. Paul's, to the National Gallery and the Tower. For the moment, however, her aspirations were limited to the Thames Embankment. It would do her husband good, she felt sure, on a morning so exquisite as this, to stroll a little along the wide pavement, to sit for an hour on one of the convenient benches, and gaze on the smoky traffic of the shining river. To induce Mr. Holland to do anything, however, was a task—Elisabeth had long since discovered that—almost beyond her powers. More than once formerly, she had shed bitter tears over the trivial obstinacy that resisted, often to untoward results, for the mere sake of resistance. She minded less now; she was accustomed to it, and only did her best so to act as not to arouse an unreasoning opposition. It was an odious necessity; and not the least tragic part of Elisabeth's life, perhaps, lay in the fact that the poor child had almost ceased to perceive how odious it was.

The chimes of some neighboring church struck three-quarters past ten. Elisabeth left the balcony, and passing through the long window that opened to the floor, entered the little sitting-room. It was a dingy apartment, with almost as much black horsehair and mahogany as her dining-parlor at home; but it was clean; the morning sun shone in; it did well enough. Elisabeth tied on her little black straw bonnet, which was lying on a chair. To dress as if to go out—that was her idea—and then it would perhaps occur to her husband to propose to go with her. She tied on her bonnet and rang the bell for the beef-tea that he always took at eleven (the question of the beef-tea, it may be mentioned, had settled itself, Mr. Holland's fit of obstinacy not surviving the conversation that had provoked it; that happened sometimes, much to Elisabeth's relief). She took the little tray when it appeared, and was about to carry it into the adjoining room, when the door communicating between the two apartments opened, and Mr. Holland came in. The change to London had done him good for the moment, at any rate; he was looking stronger than when Gordon Temple saw him, his color

was better, his movements, always slow, indicated a weakness less extreme. He sank at once, however, into an armchair, and held out his hand for the cup that Elisabeth offered him.

"That is right, my dear; that is what I wanted," he said, with more kindness in his voice than it always held for her. He took the cup and drank off its contents. It was a pale, a not very inviting-looking fluid; the lodging-house cook, as Elisabeth had at once discovered with dismay, was one of the worst qualified of her class. Mr. Holland, however, was not particular; indeed, his indifference to, his want of perception rather, of the difference between good cooking and bad, might by many people have been accounted a serious moral deficiency. He set his cup down now without a remark.

"My dear," he said, leaning back in his chair, "I have come to a decision that I hope will give you pleasure. I have decided to go to Venice."

Elisabeth felt an immense throb of joy. "Oh, yes," she said. "I am glad—I am glad!"

"Well," he said, "I am glad too, to have been able to meet your wishes. I imagined that they tended in that direction." He paused; his last remark might have seemed an invitation to his wife for an expression of her private hopes and desires; but Elisabeth's past experience did not lead her to interpret it as such.

"When do you think of going?" she said at last, with some timidity.

"Well, I thought in about a week," he answered. "We have been here—how long? Five, six days? We might take the rooms on for another week; they are commodious enough and not at all expensive. I am glad I applied to Cockerell for an address; Cockerell is always to be relied on."

He paused again. Elisabeth was silent, though she wondered why they should remain on in London, since her legal business was already concluded. Half an hour ago, she would have been content—she had thought so—to stay on there indefinitely; now, could she have had her will, she could have packed their portmanteaus, called a cab, and been off within an hour. She stood silent, however, and in half a minute Mr. Holland spoke again:

"My dear, I should be glad of the railway-rug over my knees; I feel rather chilly. Thank you, that is better," as Elisabeth arranged it for him. "I was about to say," he

went on, leaning back again in his chair, "that since leaving Thornton Briars I have been having some correspondence with Dr. Fawcett that has influenced my final decision in regard to Venice."

"Oh, does he approve of the climate for you?" said Elisabeth. "I'm glad of that—oh, I feel sure that you will get better there."

"Oh, he doubtless approves," said Mr. Holland; "but he has not been there, my dear, any more than I have; I imagine myself, on that point, to be as good a judge as he. What I was going to say is, that he has influenced my decision by giving me an opportunity I am glad to avail myself of, to make some return for all the kindness he has shown me at different times. He has written to beg that Dulcie may accompany us."

Elisabeth stood motionless and speechless; she could not have spoken. This was worse than Westport—worse than Thornton Briars.

"Dulcie, it appears," Mr. Holland went on, "has been ailing all the winter, and her father has been anxious that she should have some change. As soon as she heard there was some prospect of our going to Venice, the possibility of accompanying us occurred to her. But she behaved with a great deal of nice feeling; she would not suggest it even to her father, so long as we were at Thornton Briars, for fear of embarrassing me in the event of my not wishing to consent."

He paused. Elisabeth was still speechless. At last she found her voice.

"You shall consent?" she said.

"Undoubtedly, my dear, I shall consent. In fact, I have already written to say so in this letter, which you will perhaps post for me, as you seem to be going out."

He laid the letter on the table. Elisabeth looked at it; she did not touch it. All at once she colored extremely.

"I think——" she began, in a voice that was half audible. She recovered herself. "The question is one that concerns me also, Robert," she said.

"Do you mean that you object?" he answered, looking at her. "What is your objection?"

Elisabeth made no answer. The strong feeling she entertained toward Dulcie was one so personal to herself, it touched her conscience and her pride alike so intimately, that she could not bring it forward; the day for such frank explanations as that between her husband and herself was

past. There might be indeed another, and, as she knew, a very sufficient objection in Mr. Holland's eyes—that of expense; but she could not persuade herself to speak of that. She could not have borne, even remotely, to try and serve her own ends by appealing to her husband's failings. It was a point, however, that Mr. Holland, on his part, found no difficulty whatever in treating with perfect frankness.

"Of course," he said, "Dulcie's being with us will entail no extra expense. Otherwise, whatever my wishes might be, I should be unable to consent to the arrangement. But her father not only pays (that is a matter of course) for her journey, but he proposes a fairly adequate sum for her weekly board while she is with us; so there will be no difficulty on that score."

"Oh, but we couldn't allow that—could we?" said Elisabeth, in haste, and faltering. "I mean, you have so often said that Dr. Fawcett will never take a fee—and it is your brother's house, and for a few weeks only——"

She broke off as her husband looked at her with a frigid eye. "All that," he said, "lies so entirely within my own judgment, that we need not discuss it. I am sorry that you should not wish Dulcie to accompany us. I have, as you suggest, a sense of obligation to Dr. Fawcett, and it is my particular desire that she should."

Elisabeth was silenced. Then the wretched nature of the scheme, the dull spectacle of all her own tarnished hopes and plans, wrought upon her, and she spoke again with a sort of passion.

"Don't let us go to Venice," she said; "let us give it up altogether, unless you are sure that it will do you more good than anything else. Let us stay on here; you have been much better since you came. Let us stay on in London."

Mr. Holland made a movement of impatience. "I think," he said, mildly enough, however, "it is useless to argue the point further. I have made my decision, and I do not propose to alter it. I can only regret that you should take so unreasonable and selfish a view of the matter. You are both selfish and unreasonable, Elisabeth. I should have imagined, from your own point of view even, the plan to have many advantages. I leave you a good deal alone; I often regret that I am unable to be more with you; but in Dulcie you will have a companion of your own age. You have tastes in common, probably; you like each other——"

"No!" said Elisabeth, clasping and unclasping her hands; "I do not like her; and she doesn't like me."

"You are wrong," said Mr. Holland, with gravity; "you appear, in fact, to have taken an altogether unreasonable and unreasoning dislike to her; but she likes you very much—she has often spoken to me of you in terms of affectionate kindness."

"She has no business to speak of me at all!" cried Elisabeth, moved to sudden indignation. She walked to the window, and stood for a moment with her back to the room. "I am going out," she said then, almost inarticulately; and gathering up her gloves, she swept like a flame from the house.

Her steps led her to the embankment; and she walked along it nearly a mile without realizing her course. The spring air, the jocund aspect of the day, said nothing to her now; she walked and walked in a simple, blind longing to get away. To escape was always Elisabeth's first instinct at each crisis of her fate, to free herself, to solve her difficult problems through a flight into liberty. The imprisoning conditions of life, the hard bonds of the inevitable, chafed and exasperated her, at such moments, more than solid bolts and bars could have done. She felt suffocated as she walked along; she felt as if she must put miles between herself and her husband before she could again breathe freely. But very soon the first whirl of passion subsided; her pace slackened, and presently, she sat down on one of the benches facing the river, to think. The sweet and generous influence of the day began to make itself felt again; it was like a rallying hand laid on her shoulder, bidding her be of good cheer, since the world could still look so glad. Elisabeth could not feel very cheerful; on the contrary, she felt completely miserable; but she rose after awhile, and began to walk onward with a more composed step. She could not go back yet; the little sitting-room she had left seemed still haunted by the odious, desecrating scene she had just been through. Yes, it was odious, it was desecrating, that was how she felt it; she never got used to contentions with her husband; they seemed to sully her finest aspirations, to cast her out into some place haunted by all manner of evil spirits. She could not go back yet; but in the softer mood that was coming over her, she thought she would, after all, fulfil a half-formed purpose of the early morning. She had thought, while tying her bonnet-strings, that if she could

not induce her husband to take a walk, she would go herself and visit the church where, in former years, he had been curate. It was a sort of pious pilgrimage she had long ago proposed to herself, but had never yet had the opportunity to carry out. Mr. Holland had once happened to mention to her—it was in the earliest days of their married life—that he had, for a year or two, been curate at a church in a certain populous London district. The words had escaped him unawares, probably; certainly he had had no desire to emphasize them; but it so happened that the church—St. John Martyr was its name—though old-fashioned, and lying somewhat out of the way, was not so remote from the more fashionable quarter in which her uncle and aunt lived as to be unknown to Elisabeth. Once or twice even, as she recalled with delighted surprise at the coincidence, she had walked there to afternoon service with her nurse; she lost herself in speculations as to whether she might not unwittingly have heard her future husband preach, or, at the very least, read the afternoon prayers. But Mr. Holland showed so little interest in the discussion, he turned the subject at last so abruptly, that Elisabeth never alluded to the matter again. The wish to visit the church remained, nevertheless, in her mind; and now, in the duller misery that succeeded the first hurry of her passion, she determined to carry it out. She felt as if there, in the old parish church for which he had worked, in which he had ministered, she might find her husband again; not as she had left him just now, nor as she had come to know him in these later years; but as she had imagined and found him (so she had thought) on that distant Sunday in Schlossberg, when she had heard him preach. Surely her idea of him then had had some existence in fact.

She left the embankment, turned up one of the streets to the Strand, and presently hailing an omnibus that would suit her purpose—she had made some acquaintance with omnibuses in these last few days—desired the conductor to set her down at the point nearest her destination. That rude, jostling, jarring drive through the crowded streets, confronting her with indifferent faces coming and going, calmed Elisabeth's agitation as nothing else could have done. She still felt unhappy enough, since nothing of what made her unhappy was changed; but a quieter mood succeeded. All the heat of her passion and the anger of it were gone by the time she left the omnibus; turning

down a quiet side street, she found herself at the point she sought.

It was an old brown brick church, with square-paned, round-arched windows, a doorway with a classic pediment, an incongruous steeple, and that air of drowsy repose, of well-cushioned unquestioning faith, finding the material for many a simple and holy life between the high walls of a pew and the old brown boards of the Church of England Prayer-book, that may well inspire a tearing, sensational, iconoclastic generation with a passing reverence for those old ugly brick churches of a more tranquil, if not a worthier past. The outer door stood open, and behind the inner green baize an indefinite murmur told that some noon-day service was being held. Elisabeth entered the building and slipped into a seat; not because she was especially in the mood to say her prayers—indeed, that whole question of prayer-saying, on which her marriage was to have thrown such sunlight illumination, was fallen into somewhat sad bewilderment in our heroine's brain—but because, having come to see the church, she thought herself fortunate in finding it open. She sank into a high-pewed seat then, while the prayers and litanies went on, with no great thought of what she was doing; till presently something in the way in which the service was being read, something just and sympathetic in voice and intonation, made her raise her head and look at the reader. It was no shadow of her husband that she saw; no one less like her husband could be imagined. A white-haired old man —he might be the rector, she supposed—occupied the reading desk; a tall old man, with a slight stoop and a brown and wrinkled kindly face. Soothed by his voice and by the sense of his presence, Elisabeth dropped her head again and let her thoughts wander. Stings of repentance began to assail her. Sunshine and blue sky looked in through the clear-paned windows; a sparrow chirped with obtrusive cheerfulness; a boy's irrelevant whistle rose shrilly outside above the pious monotony within. Elisabeth thought, with the keenest self-reproach, of her husband sitting alone in the dull little lodging-house parlor where she had left him. Why had she left him? Because Dulcie—— The name tore at Elisabeth's new found repentance and half destroyed it. She could not bear to think of Dulcie; and that she could not bear it was still the deepest injury—so it seemed to her—that Dulcie had done her yet. Selfish? Yes, it might be self-

ish; but if so, there lay the sharpest sting. Her feeling toward Dulcie besmirched all her life; it robbed it of its finer quality; it seemed to compel her to a lower view. If Dulcie were but different! But Dulcie was Dulcie, and she was she; these were the facts of life that no penitential pangs could alter. A storm of contending passions rose again and shook Elisabeth as she knelt through the concluding prayers. The prayers were ended presently, and she could kneel there no longer; the benediction was pronounced; the meagre congregation was quickly gone from the church. Elisabeth had risen with the rest, but she did not immediately depart; she would so willingly have found some calm, some touch in harmony with the quiet place, before she left. It was not Dulcie's importunate image she had come here to find, but her husband's; and now, instead of either, it was herself she saw, as she stood and looked about her—herself, a little eight-year-old child, with rough untidy locks that always brought her into trouble, staring up from her nurse's side through the long yawning lessons and sermon at the queer old monuments that adorned the walls. The monuments were there still; it seemed strange to Elisabeth that it should be so, when that little child was gone forever. She was gazing up at one of them, though hardly seeing what she looked at, when a black-bonneted pew-opener accosted her.

"I beg pardon, miss," she said; "but I'm just going to shut up the church."

Elisabeth started and turned to go; but in the same moment the white-haired clergyman who had read the service approached them from the vestry. He looked at Elisabeth for a moment with a kindly eye, then addressed himself to the woman.

"No hurry, no hurry, Mrs. Parsons," he said; "this lady would perhaps like to see the church. We are very proud of our monuments," he continued, turning to Elizabeth. "I don't know whether you are interested in such things."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about them," said Elisabeth, blushing; "but I remember seeing these when I was a child. I have never been here since."

The old clergyman looked at her again, pleased by her youthful bloom, her slim grace, her glance, at once diffident and candid. "Ah, you would appreciate them more now, I am sure," he said. "Do allow me the pleasure of

showing them to you. I think a great deal of them ; they give me a vast amount of trouble to keep just in the right state of preservation, and I like them the better for the trouble they give."

Elisabeth, glad to be diverted from the tragic contemplation of her own futile history, followed the old man round the church. Her interest, a little wandering at first, was speedily caught and held, and pleased by her ready intelligence, her conductor presently proposed that she should accompany him to the vestry, and look at some curious old books preserved there. Elisabeth made no demur ; she was glad to have something to engage her mind altogether apart from the dreary details of her life. She followed her new acquaintance willingly, and, seated at the vestry table, began turning over one and another of the volumes he produced from some ancient cupboard in the wall. As the last was closed, she looked up at him.

"Thank you for the trouble you have taken," she said, in her shy way ; "it has all interested me very much. And it interests me the more," she went on, "because my husband was once curate in this church. That was what brought me here to-day. I wanted to see it."

"Your husband, my dear young lady !" said the old clergyman. It had not occurred to him that Elisabeth was married. Her diffident manner, her simple dress and slim girlish form still gave her at times the aspect of a shy school-girl.

"Yes ; he was curate here for two years. I don't know if you will remember him," said Elisabeth, coloring a little.

"If he has been curate," said the old man, smiling, "any time within these six-and-twenty years, I shall certainly remember him, for that is the time I have spent in this parish. Might I inquire his name ?"

"Oh, you will know him," said Elisabeth, pleased. Her new acquaintance had inspired her with confidence. "It is only twelve or fourteen years," she continued, "since my husband was curate here. His name is Robert Holland."

"Robert Holland !" said the old clergyman. He looked at her in amazement. "My dear young lady, do you mean to tell me that you are Robert Holland's wife ? Excuse me," he went on immediately. "I knew your husband very well, of course. He worked with me for two years. But I have lost sight of him latterly. I heard his health had broken down ; but I had no idea that he was married."

"We have been married nearly three years," said Elisabeth, simply, and rather sadly; it seemed a short formula to express so much of her life. The old man looked at her again, studying her face with his shrewd benevolent eye.

"You have taken me by surprise," he explained at last; "but I am glad to have met you—to have made your acquaintance," he said, with a kind and courteous smile, "and to hear of your husband again. I have not seen him since he left me, but I followed his career for some years with great interest. He has spoken of me to you, perhaps."

"I—I think not," said Elisabeth, slightly confused. "No, I'm sure he has not," she went on, with more assurance, "for he has never told me anything about his life here; he only happened to mention once that he had been curate at this church. I'm sure I should have remembered if he had mentioned you."

She smiled in her turn—the shy smile that gave a charming expression to her brown eyes. But her companion did not immediately respond; he sat looking at her seriously; his mind seemed to be searching the past.

"Robert Holland!" he said again, in a moment. "Well, well, it is only natural he should have not mentioned me: that is only natural. It's a good many years since we parted. I was sorry," he went on, addressing Elisabeth more directly and with some abruptness, "to hear that his health had broken down. That was some time ago, and I take shame to myself that I have never made further inquiries. But the years seem shorter to me now than the months, I dare say, seem to you, and I only now realize how long it is since I heard of his illness. But he is better, I trust."

"He is—no, he is not much better," said Elisabeth. "I sometimes think he is; but he's not able to do much. We are on our way now to Italy for the spring."

"Ah, well, that is excellent for an invalid—excellent," said the old man; "you escape the east winds. You are staying in London, perhaps, on your way? I should like to come and see your husband."

"Oh, that would be very kind of you. I will tell him; he'll be pleased," said Elisabeth. "We are to be in London a week longer; I will give you our address. And I must be going," she said, starting up in consternation as her eye fell upon a clock. "We dine at two; I shall be late."

She pulled out a card, wrote her address hastily in pencil, and gave it to her new acquaintance. He presented her with a card in return, inscribed with the name of the Reverend Arthur Brudenel.

"That is my name," he said; "and tell your husband from me how much pleasure it will give me to see him again. I will try to come to-morrow afternoon. And now, if you must go, will you allow me to see you to a cab?"

"I think," said Elisabeth, coloring, "I had better take an omnibus; it's rather far."

"Ah, I dare say you are right," he answered; "the omnibuses are very convenient; and if you will permit me, I will see that you take one that will set you down at the top of your street. You will find yourself at home, I think, in plenty of time."

They left the church together. In a moment Mr. Brudenel spoke again.

"I am grieved," he said, "that you cannot give a better account of your husband. I'm afraid he broke down originally from overwork."

"Yes," Elisabeth answered; "and he will overwork himself still when we are at home. I am glad for that reason that we are going to Venice. He can't do any parish work there."

"Ah, he was always a tremendous fellow for work—and obstinate about it too," said her companion, smiling. "I used to tell him that no one was expected to pull down a wall and build it up again in a day—that was his notion of setting to work! I don't wonder he knocked himself up at last." He was silent for a minute. "I am sincerely glad," he said then, "to have come across him again. You know, Mrs. Holland, your husband was quite a young fellow when he was with me; it was his first curacy, and I took an interest in him, as I might have done in a boy of my own. Tell him from me—tell him from me—but no," he said checking himself, "tell him nothing except the pleasure I shall have in seeing him again. I will certainly come to-morrow afternoon."

"Thank you; I'll tell him," said Elisabeth. They had reached the main road, and she held out her hand as she spoke. She felt a great confidence in her new acquaintance, with his wise and kindly glance; she felt that if he had known anything of her troubles, he might, perhaps, have been able to help her. Elisabeth had had one great

deception, but she had not yet lost her belief in the power of people wiser than herself to help her set her crooked ways straight. Possibly the old clergyman divined something of her not very complicated feelings. He shook hands with her kindly.

"I am very glad to have met you," he said again; "and pray remember, if I can assist you at any time, how gladly I shall do so. I am—I have always desired to be—your husband's friend."

He hailed a passing omnibus as he spoke. Elisabeth jumped in, and the next moment was being carried on her way.

She went on her way, but in a different mood from that in which she had made the same jolting journey an hour before. The current of her thoughts had been changed; she could think not uncheerfully now, even of Dulcie. After all, things might turn out quite otherwise than she imagined. Venice was not Thornton Briars; Dulcie could at least have no neat parish-books to produce there; and, after all, how selfish—how selfish of her not to be glad of anything that could make her husband's sad life a little brighter! She would tell him so when she got home; she would post the letter to Dr. Fawcett before she took off her bonnet. Something is risked, I am aware, in betraying these unheroic workings of Elisabeth's mind; the tragic passions of life, of love and jealousy and remorse, are worked out, it may be said, on other lines than these.

Nevertheless, it is occasionally found that a contemplation of the eternities, of the tremendous issues of existence, of the great chess-board where good and evil spirits play with souls for pawns, may be less efficacious to bring about a rational way of looking at things than a simple change of ideas that shifts the shadows, so to speak, and lets in a flicker of sunlight across the gloom. This was what her meeting with Mr. Brudenel had done for Elisabeth; more than this, it had brought her for a brief space under that rare and finest influence—the influence of a character ripened to wisdom through goodness, to which a nature like Elisabeth's could never remain unresponsive. Decidedly, the ways of life seemed less difficult to her than when she left home some two or three hours before.

It is a drawback to that fine medicine of a change of ideas that the efficacy of the remedy is apt to be short-lived; on the whole, perhaps, the eternities stand us in better stead. Already, as the house-door closed upon

Elisabeth, and she ascended the dingy stairs, the old atmosphere began to close around her. She entered the little sitting-room softly, a habit she had acquired in the fear of her disturbing her husband should he happen to have fallen asleep. Mr. Holland was not asleep, however; the cloth was laid for their early dinner, and he was seated at a side table writing. Elisabeth glanced at a clock on the mantel-piece; to her relief she perceived that it still wanted some minutes to two. She began moving about the room quietly, looking for her husband's letter. Presently he turned round.

"You are in want of something?" he said.

"I was looking for your letter to Dr. Fawcett," said Elisabeth, with humility. "I should have time, I thought, to post it before taking off my bonnet."

"It is posted," replied Mr. Holland; "I took it myself." He also glanced at the clock. "It is close upon dinner-time," he said; "I begged that it might be served punctually."

Elisabeth went to take off her bonnet, the cheerful flicker effectually put out. It is one thing to propose the penitential posting of a vexed argument; it is another to find the argument posted and disposed of in one's absence, the final word spoken without giving another chance of appeal. She said nothing, however, on her return to the sitting-room, and the dinner passed, as it often did, almost in silence. The silence was nothing in itself; but when it fell as the sequel of a dispute, it was almost unbearable to Elisabeth; it seemed to mark the distance between herself and her husband, to show their common life worn threadbare. It vexed her the more now that she wanted to tell him of her meeting with Mr. Brudenel that morning; the terms in which the old man had spoken of his former curate had warmed her own heart; and here at least, she felt sure, was a chance to give pleasure to her husband. She took some needlework after dinner and seated herself near him, watching for an occasion to speak. Mr. Holland had taken up a newspaper, and holding it as a screen between them, made any attempt at conversation hopeless for the moment. Presently, however, he laid it down, and began to wrap a plaid he sometimes wore about his shoulders. Elisabeth rose to help him.

"Are you cold? Would you like a fire?" she said.

"Well, not on a warm day like this," he answered. "Thank you, my dear, that will do."

Elisabeth sat down. She had been conscious, while making it, of the reckless extravagance of the proposal, and did not feel too much rebuffed. In a moment she spoke again.

"The sun has gone off the room now," she said. "It was warmer this morning—and out of doors, too, it was like a summer day. I had thought you would perhaps come out with me for a little while; only then I went alone. I am sorry I went out as I did."

She laid her hand on her husband's knee as she spoke. Possibly Mr. Holland's conscience also was a little uneasy; or perhaps having taken his own way had had a mollifying effect. There seems always a chance that in taking one's own way one has driven Providence to enlist on the other side. At any rate, he answered not unkindly:

"Lost your temper, eh?" he said, laying his hand on hers. "But you lose your temper a little too readily, my dear. What do you think yourself?"

"Oh, I *am* sorry," said Elisabeth. The least touch of kindness always awakened a large response in her heart; she took her husband's chilly hand and folded it in both her own, as though to infuse into it new warmth and life.

"I wanted to tell you," she said, "where I went this morning. I went as far as the church where you told me you had once been curate."

"The church where I was curate?" said Mr. Holland slowly, looking at her. "And what, my dear, if I may inquire, took you there?"

"I wanted to see it," said Elisabeth, coloring a little. "Of course I care to see any place you have had anything to do with; and as there was a service going on I was able to go in. The clergyman who read the service took me round the church afterward to look at the monuments, and then into the vestry to see some curious old books. His name is Brudenel; he has been there twenty-six years, and he begged me to tell you that he remembers you very well, and all the hard work you used to do in the parish. He was very glad to hear of you again, and wants to see you. He asked for our address, and is coming to-morrow afternoon."

This simple relation of facts, by which Elisabeth had hoped to give some pleasure to her husband—she had purposely told her story in unimpassioned style, so as to rouse in him no antagonistic emotion—won no immediate response from Mr. Holland. He only withdrew his hand

from his wife's and drew his plaid closer round his shoulders. "I am much obliged by his remembrance," he said at last. "I should have thought it more likely he had forgotten me. It is many years since we have had anything to do with each other. My dear, I believe you are right, and that this room has grown chilly. I think I will go into the back room and rest until tea-time. I shall have the afternoon sun there, and it will be warmer."

"Oh!" cried Elisabeth, starting up; "you do look pale; you do look cold! Let me get you some brandy at once. Oh, I hope you have not taken a chill!"

She was flying to fetch his travelling-flask, fearing one of his occasional attacks of faintness; but Mr. Holland prevented her.

"Thank you, my dear; that is quite unnecessary," he said. "I feel a little cold and rather fatigued, but I will go and lie down for an hour or two. That is all that I need. Don't disturb me till tea-time."

He reappeared with the tea-tray without waiting to be called. Elisabeth, who knew every shade of change in her husband's manner, saw at once that he was in no unkindly mood. She had lighted the fire, after all, on her own responsibility; he sat down by it, spreading out his hands to the blaze, without a word of remonstrance. There was something subdued—indeed, something unusual—in his manner, that she did not altogether understand. He had not slept, he told her, but he felt rested, he felt better; and he sat drinking his tea and warming himself silently, with an apparent appreciation of the comforts provided for him. Only later in the evening he entered into any conversation.

"My dear," he said then, "kindly look in Bradshaw, and tell me what are the morning trains to Dover."

"To Dover?" said Elisabeth, with some surprise. "There is the boat-express——"

"Not the express—it is more expensive, and on the whole more fatiguing. There must be other trains that would take us down."

"Not to meet the boat," said Elisabeth, consulting her volume; "we should have to spend some hours in Dover if we took any other."

"I am thinking of spending a day or two there," said Mr. Holland; "I doubt if London—or perhaps it is only this lodging—altogether agrees with me. Our week here ends to-morrow. I propose, therefore, that we should

leave to-morrow morning and rest a day or two at Dover before going further. There is not much to do in the way of packing, I suppose?"

"No, oh no!" said Elisabeth. She was amazed beyond words by her husband's proposition. Nothing could be more unlike his usual deliberate arrangements, his careful weighing of relative expenses, his reluctance to abandon a course of action once decided on. For herself, she was well content. Since to Venice they were going—and, after all, no thought of Dulcie could wholly tarnish that word of delight—every step onward was a gain. Already beyond the narrow seas the shining shores seemed to beckon her; already she could hear the great throb of the boat that would bear them across. Meanwhile she was amazed. "What—what about Dulcie?" she said, after a brief silence; "was she not to join us here?"

"That must be arranged," said Mr. Holland; "I will write to her—or you, my dear, can write her a line to tell her to meet us at Dover. I am sorry she should lose her week in London; but she is a good girl; she will be content with any arrangement I may make."

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Elisabeth longed to question him; she longed to say "Why?" But such inquiries, as she had long since come to know, were futile. She said no more; she looked out a train, and then began to move quietly about the room, collecting a few books and other properties that were scattered about. Presently Mr. Holland also rose, and seating himself at the centre table, drew toward him the lamp and some writing materials and began to write. Elisabeth watched him for a minute, then came and stood behind him.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" she said, with diffidence; "you look so tired—I think you ought to rest."

She laid her hand on his shoulder as she spoke, a caressing movement on which she rarely ventured. Her husband took it not amiss. He paused in his writing to answer her.

"I am writing a few lines to Dulcie, my dear," he said; "I thought it best to write at once."

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Elisabeth, coming round to the side of the table; "I didn't know you wanted the note written immediately. I should have liked to write to Dulcie myself."

Mr. Holland eyed her for a moment with a changed expression. "How do you mean," he said, "that you would

have liked to write to Dulcie yourself? You do not intend, I hope, that you disapprove of my corresponding with her?"

"Oh!" cried Elisabeth, moving back a step. She was jealous of Dulcie; alas! she knew it too well. But the commonness of the feeling attributed to her by her husband revolted her. "Such an idea never entered my head for a moment—not for a single moment," she said; "I only meant that I should have liked to show that I am will—that I am willing Dulcie should come with us."

"Well, well," said Mr. Holland, relentingly. "If I judged you unfairly, my dear, you must pardon me; the tone you have adopted toward Dulcie justifies some suspicion of unfriendly motives. It is a point you would do well to reflect on, Elisabeth. Meanwhile, you had better, perhaps, get on with the packing; we shall not have too much time to-morrow morning."

"No, I will go," said Elisabeth. She gathered up her books, and was moving to the door, when a sudden thought struck her. "I forgot," she said; "if we leave to-morrow morning we shall not see Mr. Brudenel when he calls. That will be a great pity; he seemed so anxious to see you."

Mr. Holland did not immediately answer. "He is very obliging," he said at last, without looking up from his writing, "but it is not of the slightest consequence, my dear. People are like that; they forget one for years, and then think it necessary to express some particular pleasure at coming across one again. We needn't trouble ourselves about Brudenel."

"I think he will be disappointed," said Elisabeth, reluctantly; "he didn't seem to have forgotten you. Shall I write to him this evening to say we shall have left?"

"My dear, you will oblige me," said her husband, with some peremptoriness, "by letting the matter be. Brudenel will probably have forgotten all about it by to-morrow, and not come at all. If he does, I shall in any case leave word with the maid that we have left London sooner than we expected. That will be all that is needed. The matter is of no importance," he said again; "you excite yourself unduly, my dear, over these trifles."

Elisabeth acquiesced, or at least was silent, and left the room. She did not feel very excited, but she was sorry; she would have liked to see her acquaintance of the old books and the old monuments once more.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DULCIE MAKES HERSELF USEFUL.

Elisabeth's black straw hat and gloves lay beside her on the shining concrete floor. She had dragged a heavy chair, with frayed brocade and a black worm-eaten back, on to the wide step in the embrasure of a window, that she might rest her arms on the cushioned ledge and gaze out. The window was in a long ante-chamber, sparely furnished with an old and toneless grand piano, some blackened pictures in massive tarnished frames, two settees covered with more frayed yellow brocade, and a couple of black carved chairs. But these meagre fittings, combined with a lofty stuccoed and frescoed ceiling, gave the place a high air of shabby antiquity that Elisabeth would not willingly have seen exchanged for the finest efforts of modern upholstery. Four doors led from this apartment respectively to the dining-room, the sitting-room, the entry, and a disused bedroom, vast and frescoed like the ante-chamber, and where the bed and chairs seemed to be mere accidents in space. Elisabeth had come in from a solitary walk, and had sat down on her way to the salon, partly, perhaps, through weariness—perhaps partly that through the closed door she could distinguish the voice of Dulcie reading to her husband. She had taken off her hat then, and resting her arms on the cushioned window-ledge, was trying, as she tried twenty times a-day, to realize that this was Venice. "Venice, Venice!" she kept repeating to herself, as if the beautiful name—beautiful even in English—would help her to such realization. The scene she looked upon was Venetian enough; the palazzo formed an angle where a narrow water-lane entered the broad highway of the Grand Canal, and Elisabeth from her window looked across a strip of dull green shadowed water lying deep below, on the lofty blackened front of an old palace, one of those façades so common in Venice, whose weather-stained, peeling walls form so admirable a setting for the airy grace of the arched and pillared windows that pierce the solid masonry at frequent intervals. Iron balconies, set with flower-pots, projected from these windows; now and then a head would appear, or a woman's form lean forward over the slender railing.

The water lay deep below, shadowed and quiet, crossed some hundred paces further up by a steep-arched bridge; from time to time a gondolier's cry would be heard, and swiftly rounding the angle, with a long swish of the oar, a gondola would glide past and vanish out of sight. Beyond, in the May sunshine, lay the shimmer and splendor of the Grand Canal, as it widened toward the lagoons, the domed whiteness of the Salute rising against the sky. Yes, there was no doubt that it was Venice; but Elisabeth was taking Venice very seriously. She had, as everyone does not, fallen in love with it at first sight; it was not altogether what she had imagined it would be, though the main features of the place had been familiar beforehand to her, as to everyone; but before she had been there four-and-twenty hours she declared to herself that it was more beautiful than anything she could have imagined. But she was disposed, as I say, to take it seriously; it impressed her; it impressed her too much; she could not realize it. She felt as if she were nibbling at the rind of the gorgeous fruit; she wanted to get at its core; she wanted to reach the heart of the beautiful city; she wanted to feel Venice through and through.

Elisabeth, it will be perceived, was in as great a hurry as if she had wished to swallow the fruit of this particular tree of knowledge at one gulp, since she had been in Venice for three days only; at the same time it must be admitted that three days' residence in the city of her dreams had done less to satisfy her than might have been expected of even so brief a period. She would, in fact, have taken larger possession of Venice had it not been for those sad vexations of life that one would so willingly stow away with portmanteau and travelling-bag on arriving at the goal of one's desires, only to pull out when the work-a-day world must needs begin again. The journey out had been propitious. Mr. Holland had been, for him, wonderfully well and genial. His spirits had risen as soon as Dulcie Fawcett joined them; he bore the journey without too much fatigue; he seemed better in health than he had been for many months past. It is true that Elisabeth was thankful when the journey came to an end, since it seemed to her accompanied by a constant grumbling chorus of under-feed waiters and porters; she learned to fly from her husband's side, to retreat into the furthest corner of railway-carriage or hotel-omnibus, that she might neither hear the malcontents nor witness Mr. Holland's mild

triumph over his natural enemies. These were ignoble moments that went far to make the journey hateful to her. On the other hand, Miss Fawcett behaved unexceptionably; she never obtruded herself, possibly because, as she said, she was not a good traveller; and to sit quietly in a corner with a book, ignoring, as far as possible, the accidents of travel, seemed to her the only plan to ward off fatigue. Still, on occasion, she could make herself useful; and, in short, from whatever cause, proved herself that rarest of rare birds, a pleasant travelling companion. And when, presently arriving in Venice, Elisabeth saw the large fresh rooms prepared for their reception—rooms commanding that incomparable view whose strange and supreme beauty strikes the beholder as an ever-renewed miracle—then a thrill of immense happiness filled her heart. It was as though a great curtain that had hung across her life had been drawn aside.

Otto Holland, in offering the use of this apartment to his brother, had included the services of an old woman, who was engaged to look after and dust the rooms when they were empty, and to perform the same functions with a moderate amount of cooking, when they were occupied. He had omitted, however, to provide a gondola, or the gondolier who plays an important part in Venetian households; and though this addition to their party was hinted at to Elisabeth through the medium of old Maddalena's niece, a highly decorative young lady from a milliner's shop, who spoke a little English, Mr. Holland would as soon have thought of setting up a carriage in London as a gondola in Venice; and Maddalena remained sole mistress of the establishment. Fortunately she was of matchless probity, for Elisabeth knew hardly a dozen words of Italian to begin with; though in a very few days, with phrase-book and dictionary, she had learned that selection of useful phrases whose easy acquisition so greatly facilitates the stranger's sojourn in Italy. She learned more, for she had a talent for languages, and soon conversed fluently enough with her old woman.

Elisabeth then, I say, installed in their new rooms, felt a thrill of immense joy. If they could only live there for ever! The apartment was a large and rambling one, wandering away at the back into certain vast and dusky chambers, looking out on a central courtyard, on the narrow canal, and on an alley that flanked the house on the other side. These were seldom occupied, the five or six rooms

to the front being found sufficient for ordinary purposes; they had the dusty, gloomy air, therefore, proper to disused apartments; they were the repository for various old and odd pieces of furniture; and they were disposed with such picturesque and inconvenient irregularity that Elisabeth found, to her pleasure, in wandering through them, it was almost possible to lose her way. That was altogether her idea of an old Venetian palace. She wandered through them a good deal in the first two or three days: they helped her, in their limited way, to realize her Venice. She had thought on the first day, when, leaning out of the sitting-room window in the intervals of unpacking, she looked down on the glow and splendor of the Grand Canal, that she should never tire of watching a scene at once so novel and of a beauty so intimate through its associations. But before the second morning was over a great impatience, she found, began to possess her. She wanted to be out and about; she wanted to be in a gondola; she wanted to be seeing churches and pictures, to be gazing at San Marco, to be wondering at the Doge's Palace, to be gliding under the Bridge of Sighs—to be performing, in short, all the immemorial and classic rites proper to Venice. One would need, perhaps, to be one-and-twenty again, to have seen almost nothing of the world, to be, like Elisabeth, a creature full of a passion, an enthusiasm, an ardent curiosity, half starved even out of her own consciousness through years of meagre fare, to understand the burning impatience and longing that urged her to escape from the house and make herself free of Venice. Why did she not go? This history, it will have been long since discovered, moves on no very lofty lines of tragedy; yet to historian and reader alike, not wholly resigned to the incessant clatter of teacups, there may well be some tedium in the explanation of why she found it so difficult to perform the simple act of putting on her bonnet and going out for a walk. In the first place, Mr. Holland had no desire to go out; he preferred to rest a day or two after his journey. He was, indeed, extremely well and animated, for him. Elisabeth, who, in her inexperience of illness in general—an inexperience unenlightened by the deceptive speeches of doctors and the good-natured encouragement of friends—was always looking for the moment of a decisive change for the better to begin, was convinced that it had come now, wrought as through a miracle at once, by the air and sunshine of Venice. Looking at Ven-

ice, no miracle seemed impossible. Mr. Holland sat in placid enjoyment by the window, smoothing down his mustache and gazing at the shining scene before him. "This is very pretty; this is very pleasant!" he said more than once. "I must write and thank Otto. This is very pretty indeed." Had Elisabeth known—but she did not know, neither did he—that these were the words of a dying man, drinking in through the golden transparent air and sunshine his last impressions of life and of the world, they would have held to her apprehension a pathos so profound as to change all that came afterward. As it was, she believed that her husband was much better, and simply rejoiced at the spectacle of his enjoyment, which tended to prove that this visit to Venice, that had been the subject of so many heart-searchings, promised, so far as he was concerned, to turn out the greatest success in the world.

Elisabeth would have felt no compunction, however—to return to the original point—in leaving her husband in solitary possession of his enjoyment for an hour or so. He had never made a point of their being always together; on the contrary, he had, by degrees, given her the impression that he preferred to be alone; that her constant presence was an oppression to him, except on those occasions when some more severe attack of illness confined him to bed and Elisabeth took her place as nurse at his side. She had the habit, therefore, of going out alone, affording him such entertainment as lay in her power by a recital of her adventures when she returned. But now there was Dulcie to be considered. Miss Fawcett also, it appeared, was fatigued by the journey; and a sentiment of courtesy made Elisabeth reluctant to leave her guest and go out to seek amusement by herself. In fact, after she had twice suggested to Dulcie that all Venice lay there at their feet awaiting them, her husband interfered. "My dear," he said, "supposing we stop at home to-day. We shall, I dare say, be here for six weeks—more than time enough for all the sight-seeing you can desire. We shall none of us be the worse for a day or two of rest. For my part I could be content to sit here always and look at this lovely view—eh, Dulcie? What do you think?" It was unreasonable, perhaps, to desire more than that lovely view; nevertheless, Elisabeth presently wandered away to explore the dusky apartments, returning from time to time to the radiant world on the other side; until presently, the sunset, the twilight, the kindling sparks of the gon-

dolas held her an enchanted watcher, and she demanded no more.

A society *à trois* is proverbially (though not inevitably) discouraging to one or another, or perhaps all, who constitute it; and Elisabeth, on finding her third day in Venice passing like the first two, began, with a sinking heart, to see a long vista of such days stretching before her. She wondered where Frau Werner was living, whether the Sparrows were indeed in Venice, and was Emilia coming? She had heard nothing from Madame von Waldorf since they left Thornton Briars; she spent a part of the day in writing to her. She spoke to her husband of the Sparrows; but Mr. Holland had sunk into a state of absolute quiescence and content, such as she had seldom seen him in before. It was the quiescence of an invalid who finds all his amusement and occupation provided for him without the slightest effort on his own part. The sunshine, the warm spring air—the weather was a Venetian May at its loveliest—the unceasing life and animation spread out before his eyes, stirred him, so to speak, to tranquillity. He was content to be idle, to sit with folded hands, to let the world and its cares drop into remoteness. It did not occur to Elisabeth to inquire—Mr. Holland himself was probably unaware—how much Dulcie contributed to this result. That young lady's presence, so disquieting to Elisabeth, was doubtless an appreciable boon to Mr. Holland. His strained relations with his wife were harassing to him as to Elisabeth; it was unquestionable that, for him, at any rate, the wheels of life moved more smoothly for Dulcie Fawcett's presence. Her society was a pleasure to him—Elisabeth, perhaps, hardly appreciated how great a pleasure. He was a discrowned, an abdicated monarch; in his own parish the life and business of the place had drifted naturally from him to his energetic curate; even when he was at home it was only a broken thread of authority that he could hold; and in these sad circumstances—it was, in truth a profound tragedy to the man—he found in Dulcie Fawcett the deference and devotion of a faithful follower; he found in her, above all, the element of adoration that was, in these days, so sadly lacking in his wife. Elisabeth, I say, hardly appreciated all this, and Mr. Holland was at no pains to instruct her. He had a very clear insight into the relations existing between her and Dulcie; and it might not be too much to say that he found a certain satisfaction in his wife's jeal-

ousy, which he held to be absolutely unreasonable. It would be unjust to say that he acted with an express view to arouse it; certainly he had principles that would have forbidden that; he simply acted as he considered he had a perfect right to act, with kindness and partiality toward a young girl he had known from a child. Nothing, he would have maintained, could be more innocent and innocuous, a mixture of the pastoral and the paternal, than the sentiment he entertained toward Dulcie. If his wife was foolish and criminal enough to be jealous, that was her fault, and it was one not altogether displeasing to him. Elisabeth's critical attitude toward himself—of which he was quite aware, however she might try to conceal it—demanded something more than passive resistance on his part; it demanded attack in return. Elisabeth was not greatly open to attack; Mr. Holland had not a captious or fault-finding temper; he was tolerant in small matters, except as they involved a question of money; and Elisabeth, as he very well knew, was a good wife to him. But there could be no question that she was to blame in her temper toward Dulcie, and here was an opportunity to his hand.

He, at any rate, then, found nothing but satisfaction in Dulcie's presence as a third in their small society. The third day found that young lady still fatigued after her journey. Elisabeth would have sympathized more with this calamity had Miss Fawcett's looks supported the statement; but she looked sufficiently blooming as she sat hour after hour making little pink and lilac cotton frocks for the village children at home. She used her needle with consummate skill, and Elizabeth watched with envious admiration the rapidity with which these small garments formed themselves under her hands. Miss Dulcie apparently took no especial interest in Venice for the moment. She sat at her sewing in an armchair placed near Mr. Holland's, only rising from time to time to look over his shoulder when he commented on the scene before him. She had a way, indeed, of responding to all the remarks he made, whether they were addressed to her in particular or not, that Elisabeth, her historian might be sorry to record (since a heroine should be above minding such trifles), found exasperating. Dulcie had also a great solicitude for Mr. Holland's comfort, which took no account of the fact that his wife was presumably better acquainted with his habits than herself; and arranged with much

elaboration a cushion and a shawl that contributed not a little to the discomfort of the object of her care. She was, in short, in a very pleased and gracious frame of mind. She had determined, on the first hint of Mr. Holland going to Venice, to accompany him, if possible ; and she had accomplished her design with very little difficulty. Dulcie Fawcett is not our heroine ; her fortunes will not greatly occupy us, and it is not my purpose to institute a very strict inquisition into her character and motives. It may suffice to say of her in general that she expended a large part of her very adequate intelligence to devising more or less roundabout ways of gaining her own ends. In saying that she devised these ways, it is not meant that, as a rule, she set herself very deliberately to scheme ; probably people rarely do, but one must think of something, as the saying is ; and a mind disposed to intrigue will intrigue instinctively, involuntarily. That great chaotic jumble that passes through the brain during our waking hours, involuntarily almost, so far as we are concerned, as the blood circulates in the veins, and which we would willingly consign to oblivion as useless lumber, is not only a final result, but a determining cause of character ; it contributes more, probably, to its final action than the best-considered meditations of our more conscious moments. Miss Fawcett had very few sincere thoughts, and it may be doubted whether she always recognized these in the great variety of insincere ones that occupied her mind. Her most genuine sentiments at this time were, perhaps, an affection for the man whose partiality she had been instructed to look on as a distinction, and jealousy of his wife ; and her actions tended as naturally to the satisfaction of these emotions as floating straws are drawn to a central current. Mr. Holland's habitual attitude toward his wife made the business almost monotonously easy. There was no need to scheme at all ; she had only to exhibit her devotion to Mr. Holland to make his wife acutely, however unreasonably, uncomfortable.

On the afternoon of the third day, Elisabeth's patience gave way quite abruptly. Her husband had gone to lie down for an hour, and Elisabeth, leaving Dulcie to the confection of a small pink frock, went first to the kitchen to speak to old Maddelena, then wandered away again to her dusky apartments at the back. There were old cabinets there ; there were certain old pictures, that in default of the glowing galleries of Venice—they seemed to her

about as far off as Labrador—might claim her attention for a time. If they were more than a trifle blackened by age and dirt, there was the greater interest in discovering what they were about. Returning presently to the sitting-room, she found that Mr. Holland had resumed his seat by the window, and that Dulcie, her shining needle laid aside for awhile, was reading the newspaper aloud to him. Elisabeth took up her own sewing and listened in silence through a leading article, then proposed to Miss Fawcett to relieve her of the task.

"I like it," that young lady protested; "there is nothing I like better than reading aloud. I often read at home in the evening."

"You read very pleasantly, my dear," said Mr. Holland; "not too fast, and with a very pleasing voice and intonation. I don't know how it is, but I follow you with more ease than I sometimes do my wife."

Elisabeth flushed up. "I thought," she said hastily and falteringly, "you liked my reading." Her thoughts flew back to a distant day at Schlossberg, when Mr. Holland had praised her voice and her elocution. She had read to him—that, at least, she had done—with a happy mind ever since.

"So I do, my dear, so I do," he said in reply; "but that doesn't mean it is not susceptible of improvement. You read too fast, for one thing. You might listen to Dulcie, and take a hint from her—if she is not too tired to go on, that is. Perhaps, though," he continued, addressing himself to Miss Fawcett, "I oughtn't to keep you in this fine afternoon, my dear. You and Elisabeth might like to go somewhere together."

His voice was kind, without the latent sarcasm and coldness with which he often spoke to or of his wife; and Elisabeth's irritation subsided in a moment. But before she could answer, Dulcie interposed.

"Oh, I would much rather stay here with you," she said quickly and sweetly. "That was what I hoped when I came to Venice—that you would let me sometimes sit with you as I do at Thornton Briars, and do what little I can. As you said yesterday, there will be plenty of time for us to see Venice; and it would be so dull for you to sit here all alone. But if you would really allow me to read to you, Mrs. Holland might perhaps be glad to go out. She was saying just now how much there is to be seen."

The singularly bad taste of this speech was lost on Mr.

Holland, whose instincts were not fine on such points; he was pleased, indeed, as was natural, by Miss Dulcie's liking for his society. It was not lost on Elisabeth; she would hardly have been woman if it had been. She wavered for a moment, then rose with some abruptness.

"Thank you; I will go out for half an hour," she said, and left the room.

She went out, but she went no further than the nearest bridge, where she stood aimless and uncertain for a few minutes, leaning on the parapet and gazing down into the dull green waters of a canal. Then an open-air vender of the Venetian shell necklaces came up and accosted her; she started, and turned to retrace her steps. She could not go on; she felt too much discouraged; her loneliness oppressed her, and the sad faults and perplexities of her life, she went back to the old palazzo, and mounted the staircase to their apartment again. She had been gone scarcely ten minutes.

So it was—to return to the point from which we started at the beginning of this wandering and retrospective chapter—that Elisabeth found herself seated in the anteroom, with her hat beside her on the floor, vaguely listening to Dulcie's voice, wondering whether she should ever do more than nibble at the rind of the gorgeous fruit before her. She had been in Venice three days, but it seemed to her an eternity.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ELISABETH MAKES AN APPOINTMENT.

The outer-door bell rang, but Elisabeth did not move. They had had no visitors since their arrival in Venice, and she had no reason to expect any. But in a moment a man's footstep sounded in the entry, the anteroom-door opened, and Gordon Temple came in. He came in looking fresh, handsome, alert, dressed in a cool light-gray suit, with a flower in his buttonhole; looking, in short, precisely as, if he were my hero—but that enviable post is occupied by Elisabeth's husband—I could wish that he should look. As he came forward, however, he felt as much, perhaps even more embarrassment than Elisabeth herself, who had sprung up with one of her quick, shy movements to greet him. It was, probably, that he had bestowed a good many

thoughts on her in these last weeks. He had said to himself—and it might or not have been the fact—that she interested him more than any woman he had ever met. He had thought of her as he had seen her at Thornton Briars, of her gentle voice and manner, of the sadness in her beautiful eyes, of the impression she had made on him of someone caught and imprisoned in the sad and sorry surroundings in which he had found her. He pronounced his cousin Robert the shabbiest fellow in the world, and declared to himself that the woman must be a saint who could be loyal to a husband like that; he had divined—little as he had seen of her, it had not been difficult to divine—that Elisabeth's loyalty was a sort of religion to her. Elisabeth, as we know, was very far from being a saint; but that was not a consideration likely to affect the point of view Gordon had taken up. If it had been indicated to him, he would have replied that by a saint he didn't mean a frigid, bloodless shadow; and that if it was easy for anyone to see, after conversing a couple of hours with Mrs. Holland, that she was a creature full of repressed impulse and longing, that did not affect the case one way or the other, except to make her appear more admirable. This, I say, being the point of view he had taken up—our imperfect Elisabeth might have been pleased, no doubt, but a trifle surprised, to find herself invested with so fine a halo—he felt something of embarrassment in seeing her again; he felt that he might probably appear to her an awkward fellow. Whatever embarrassment he may have experienced, however, his manner betrayed none. He set down his hat, and drawing forward the second chair the ante-room contained, began to ask her about her life in Venice. He himself had been there nearly a week, he said, but had heard that morning only, and quite by accident, of their arrival; he had imagined them still in London. How did she like Venice? Had she seen much of it yet? Elisabeth answered, simply enough, that her husband had been tired after his journey, and she had been out very little; but she hoped to see a great deal before they left.

"A great deal? Why, of course, you must see everything," said Gordon; "everything in Venice is worth seeing. And then sight-seeing is so delightfully easy here: one has only to step into a gondola, and getting to the place one wants to visit is as charming as the place itself."

Elisabeth was silent for a moment.

"Aren't gondolas rather expensive?" she said then, hesitatingly.

"Expensive? No, no," he said, glancing at her and smiling a little. "Otto ought to have seen to that," he went on; "he ought to have left you the use of his gondola. But perhaps you have taken one by the week? That's what people do who come to Venice for any time."

"Oh, that is what Maddalena's niece told us. Maddalena's niece, she explained, smiling, "is an important personage with us; she speaks a little English. She told us we could have one by the week; but Robert is so uncertain about going out, he thought it wouldn't be worth while."

"Well, but after all——" began Gordon. He checked himself in whatever he was about to say. "In any case," he said, "it's of no consequence at all. There is my gondola quite at your service; I hope that you, and Robert also, will use it whenever you feel disposed; and if you will allow me, it will give me pleasure to show you one or two things here."

He glanced at her again as he spoke. She was in Venice; the hope on which she had not ventured to dwell had been realized; but the sadness, as he saw, had not passed from her eyes. They brightened, however, at his words.

"Oh, thank you," she said; "that is very kind of you; it will give me a great deal of pleasure, if you can find the time; but you are busy, I know; you came here to work."

"Oh, I'm not so busy but that I can take a holiday occasionally," he answered, smiling. "With your permission I shall come very soon. May I come to-morrow? I have an engagement, unfortunately, that will take up the earlier part of the day; but the days are long now, and I could call for you after four o'clock, if that would suit you. That would still leave us two or three hours."

"Thank you," said Elisabeth, hesitating. Then the splendor of the scheme dawned upon her; her face was illuminated. "I must ask Robert," she said; "I'm afraid I can't very well decide at once without speaking to him. He might like to go out to-morrow afternoon. I want him to go out as soon as he is rested."

"It doesn't in the least signify," Gordon answered. "I shall call, at any rate. If you can go, so much the better; if not, we must take another day. How is Robert? Does Venice suit him, do you think?"

"It suits him very well indeed," said Elisabeth, with an-

imation. "He is wonderfully well—better than he has been for a very long time. I think he has really taken a turn, and will get better now."

"Well, that's good news, at any rate," said Gordon. He took up his hat. "Can I see him?" he inquired, "or is he engaged?"

"No, he is not engaged; he will be very happy, I think, to see you. Miss Fawcett was reading the newspaper to him, but I'll tell him you are here."

"Miss Fawcett? Miss Dulcie, do you mean? Is she with you?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth, "she is with us." She let the sentence drop at these words in a way Gordon had noticed in her before; it was as if words had all at once become inadequate for expression. If so, she was probably unconscious of it. "Will you come into the next room?" she said, rising; "we shall find Robert there."

"No; on second thoughts, don't disturb him, for I could only stay a minute," said Gordon rising also. "I'll come in another day. To-morrow, in fact," he added, holding out his hand.

"Yes, thank you," answered Elisabeth, a little absently. "I wanted to know," she said, detaining him, "whether your father is really coming to Venice. Emilia wrote that he perhaps would."

"No, no," he answered, his face clouding over a little, "that was only a fancy of his. He is too old, too infirm; the journey would be too much for him."

"You found him—was he less well?" said Elisabeth.

"Well, a little changed, a little broken. I hope to run up to Schlossberg again in two or three weeks." There was a minute's silence. "That being the case, Emilia will not come, either," he said; "you know how good she is, how devoted to my father. But the Baroness hopes to come next month; she has set her heart on it. She wants to see you."

"Oh, I want to see her!" cried Elisabeth, from the bottom of her heart; and with these words they parted.

Elisabeth went on into the sitting-room. Mr. Holland was alone; Dulcie had finished reading, apparently; her place, at any rate, was vacant, and Mr. Holland leaning back in his chair, was slowly scanning the columns of the newspaper he had picked up. Elisabeth came in and sat down quietly. She had to tell her husband that Gordon Temple had called; and she would have much preferred not to

have to tell him. His dislike to his relations was a continual stumbling-block to her ; she could not imagine why he disliked them ! She knew, indeed, or fancied, that he resented their superior wealth as an injustice to himself ; but that was too pitiful a reason (so it seemed to Elisabeth) to be at the root of his aversion. It was not, at any rate, one that she cared consciously to accept. For the moment, however, it was not the general question, but the particular fact that she had to tell him, that occupied her mind. But she would be able in telling him of Gordon Temple's visit to inform him also that Emilia was not coming to Venice ; possibly the one piece of news might counteract the effect of the other. She sat silent until Mr. Holland, laying his newspaper across his knee, addressed her.

"Well, my dear," he said, "did you go out ?"

"Yes, I went out," said Elisabeth ; "but I didn't go far." She paused a moment. "I wish you could go out also," she said then, diffidently. "Venice must be very beautiful ; you would enjoy it, I think."

"Well, well, we shall see," said Mr. Holland, "in a day or two perhaps. There is no hurry. I am very well content here."

"If you didn't care to walk——" Elisabeth began. "Your cousin Gordon has just been here," she added, with no apparent relevance.

Mr. Holland smoothed out the paper on his knee and turned it before answering. "Well," he said then, "why did he not come in ?"

"He did," said Elisabeth. "I was sitting in the anteroom, and he spoke to me there. Dulcie was reading to you, and he said he wouldn't disturb you, as he could stay for a minute only. He will come another day."

Elisabeth proffered this explanation somewhat hurriedly, under a sense of the increasing coldness of her husband's eye. "He might have come in if he was here," was all he answered, however.

"He said—he wished me to tell you," Elisabeth continued, "that his gondola is quite at your service, whenever you care to use it. He meant it, I am sure."

"He is very obliging," said Mr. Holland ; "but I have no especial desire to go in a gondola at present. So far as I could judge in the distance we traversed in coming here from the railway-station, the motion is singularly unpleasant."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Elisabeth. She did not know

what to say. She had counted a good deal beforehand on the benefit her husband might derive from the enjoyment of air and sunshine without incurring any fatigue. But it was useless, she knew, to urge the point.

"But that," continued Mr. Holland, unfolding and spreading out the newspaper, "need not prevent you, my dear, from availing yourself of Gordon's offer as often as you please. I don't pretend to give you a gondola for your own use; but if there is one at your service, don't hesitate to use it."

"No!" cried Elisabeth, "that is not what I meant at all." Her husband's tone was extremely wounding. It was the first time since they had been in Venice, since they had left London even, that he had spoken to her in that strain.

"I am conscious," Mr. Holland went on in his deliberate tones, continuing to turn the paper, "that you consider it very dull, in a place like this, to be shut up with an invalid. You are naturally anxious to see Venice; go, my dear, and see it. I do not, as you are aware, object to being left alone; in fact, I frequently prefer it. And in any case Dulcie, who is not in strong health either, will give me as much of her society as I may desire. By no means let me feel that I am a check upon your amusements.

The horrible injustice of these words stung Elisabeth to the heart. She was dimly conscious, indeed, that her husband, being for some reason put out, as the saying is, was simply giving utterance to his irritation. But the consciousness hardly consoled her.

"Why — why——" she began, passionately; but was checked, as she had been often checked before, by the sad aspect of his worn and suffering face. It changed her mood. "You know," she said, leaning forward and placing her hand upon his knee, a note of passion still trembling in her voice, "that I care for nothing—nothing in the whole world, so much as to be with you. I do want to see Venice; but all that would be nothing to me if you would let me stay with you. But you don't—" she choked back a sob—"you don't always care to have me, or to let me help you. If—if——"

She broke off as she was about to speak Dulcie's name. Since that brief scene in London, speech about Dulcie had become almost impossible to her. She dreaded to see her husband's eyes turned coldly on her, to find herself accredited with some base commonness of thought.

"If what?" he said now, his eyes still fixed on the paper. But they were interrupted, as the door opened; for, followed by Dulcie herself, no less a personage than Mr. Sparrow entered the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ELISABETH MAKES A SECOND APPOINTMENT.

Elisabeth sprang up, in the hope that Mrs. Sparrow and Mary might be following; but the door closed behind Dulcie; Mr. Sparrow was alone. Elisabeth, who had never liked the English chaplain, yet felt a thrill of welcome now; he had belonged to Schlossberg! He came in looking exactly as he used to look; three years had not changed his hard-featured, dogmatic face in the least: there was even a pamphlet sticking out of his coat-pocket, ready to be perused and scored at the first inopportune moment. He walked briskly up to Mr. Holland, who had risen and was standing with a flush of pleasure on his pale face. Elisabeth had always wondered at her husband's friendship with a man so anti-pathetic to herself as Mr. Sparrow; and after three years' experience of their widely differing tastes, she still wondered a little. The friendship, in fact, was as easy or as difficult to explain as most other friendships, since no stranger vagaries exist than those that characterize the attraction of one human being for another. From whatever reason, the liking between the two men was genuine; Mr. Holland, it is true, with the languid shrinking of an invalid from exertion, had delayed to seek Mr. Sparrow out; but he was not the less content to see him now. Mr. Sparrow, who was not emotional, got through his greeting with great promptness.

"Well, Holland, how are you? Not much to boast of, by your looks, I'm afraid. Your wife, I suppose," turning to Dulcie.

"No, no; this is our friend, Miss Fawcett, who is kindly enlivening our solitude," said Mr. Holland; "my curate, as I call her at home; eh, Dulcie? This is my wife, Sparrow; you've not forgotten her, I dare say."

"No, no, of course not," said Mr. Sparrow, holding out an absent hand to Elisabeth. He looked past her insignificant presence, out of the window. "Well, Holland, you're

in capital quarters here," he said. "I only wish I had your luck. I suppose there is no better situation in Venice. We are at Frau Werner's, as you know, perhaps, but she has made very bad choice of a house ; that's my opinion, at least."

"Oh, where is she? " said Elisabeth. "I should so much like to see her again, and Mrs. Sparrow and Mary."

Mr. Sparrow looked past her again with the expression she remembered, as if surprised that so insignificant a person should have found a place in the world ; or that, having found it, she should feel justified in calling attention to the fact.

"It's higher up the canal, on the other side," he said, briefly. "There's Pension Werner in gold letters all across the front ; no one with eyes could miss it. Well, as I was saying," he continued, seating himself in an armchair and setting down his hat, "Frau Werner has made a very bad choice of a house. A few of the front rooms are well enough, but there's no getting a front room. As I represented to her only this morning, old acquaintances like myself and my wife should have some consideration shown them ; but she only replied that if we could live as cheaply and get our choice of rooms elsewhere, we were free to go. There was something in that, one was obliged to own."

"Yes, yes, there was a good deal in that," said Mr. Holland, assenting.

"Still, it was exceedingly affronting ; but the truth is, Frau Werner has been spoiled by the Baroness—altogether spoiled." He looked round the room. "Now you, I suppose, have all this for nothing ; but you always were in luck. And how are you ? I can't say much for your looks, you know ; they haven't changed for the better in these years."

"Well, perhaps I haven't changed for the better," said Mr. Holland, smiling a little, "that may account for it."

"Oh, but you are better since we came here," said Elisabeth, leaning forward. "I am sure you are much better. We have never been in any place before that agreed with you so well."

"Well, well," said Mr. Holland, "we needn't discuss the matter, my dear. It all lies in God's hands ; He knows what is best for each of us. His will be done."

He spoke quite simply, without any touch of unction or false sentiment—the simple expression of his deepest faith. Elisabeth knew it, and her eyes shone and filled with sudden tears. That was how she liked to hear her husband speak; in such moments as these she nearly found again her old outworn belief in an infallible spiritual guide. To Mr. Sparrow, however, it was merely the conventional utterance of a brother clergyman.

"Very right, very right," he said; "still, we mustn't neglect human precautions. Don't stay out too late of an afternoon; the air after sunset is not safe here, to my mind. In fact, I don't like Venice; I never could see anything to like in it. We leave it, I'm glad to say, the first week in July, and go up to the Engadine; I have a summer chaplaincy there. You'd better come, too, Holland; the fine air would do you good."

"Thank you; but the air would be too fine for me, I believe," said Mr. Holland. "And when I leave this, I hope to return home."

"Ah well, that's the worst thing you could do," said his friend; "at home you're in your own parish and overwork yourself, to a certainty. Doesn't he overwork himself?" he said, turning suddenly to Dulcie.

The young lady addressed glanced at Mr. Holland, and looked down. "I'm afraid, indeed, that he does," she answered, twirling her fan.

"Just what I thought," said Mr. Sparrow. He leaned back in his chair, apparently at a loss what to say next. Through mere force of habit he took out his pamphlet and scored a passage or two. In a moment, however, he recollected himself and put it back into his pocket. "We are not at all comfortable at Frau Werner's," he said, resuming the subject. "For one thing, the society there is not what it used to be—not at all. Both Mrs. Sparrow and myself find a good deal to complain of. Generally I leave these matters to my wife; ladies have fancies in such things; they like this person and they dislike that; I let my wife talk. But a very objectionable woman has turned up again—a most objectionable person. I don't know if you remember her, Holland—a Mrs. Cleaver?"

"I have no recollection," said Mr. Holland.

"Your wife has, perhaps. A most objectionable woman. She was at Schlossberg three years ago, and made herself most offensive. I spoke to Frau Werner about her only yesterday. 'It will come to this,' I said, 'that she must

go, or we must ; and if we go, we don't return.' But Frau Werner has been quite spoilt by the Baroness. 'What would you have?' she said. 'Mrs. Cleaver takes my best rooms, and pays me my price. How would you have me tell her to go?' There's something in that, one has to own. But Frau Werner ought to be more particular. I told her so, and she shrugged her shoulders. She has been altogether spoilt."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Holland, tolerantly, "she has to look after her own interests, of course. I never had any fault to find with Frau Werner. I disliked Schlossberg. I have no desire ever to go there again ; but I always found the pension agreeable enough—a pleasant, sociable sort of place. There were some very friendly people there, I remember, and some pretty girls. Yes ; I enjoyed my stay there very well. Of course, in a pension the society is always changing ; but I don't dislike the life for awhile. Unfortunately, my wife does."

Elisabeth colored painfully.

"I liked it at Schlossberg," she said, in rather a choked voice. These months, to which her husband had been alluding, had been to her the most vital in her life ; for him also, it might have been supposed, they would hold memories of more intimate value than of friendly people and pretty girls. "I don't like an English boarding-house," she went on, in clearer tones ; "at least, I don't like the one at Westport. It is the only one of which I have any experience."

"You leave your curate in charge, I suppose, Holland?" said Mr. Sparrow, abruptly changing the subject. "A satisfactory man, I hope ; sound views, not given to vagaries of his own? It's an awkward thing to leave a man in control who has no immediate responsibility. I've known a parish turned topsy-turvy under those circumstances : the vicar absent, like yourself, and a young Oxford fellow, who thought he'd got a fine field to try all his theories in. I hope you have no trouble of that kind?"

"Oh, Richards goes on steadily enough," said Mr. Holland. "He's no chance," he added with a short laugh, "to try any vagaries of his own. The churchwardens would look after that."

"Well, so much the better under the circumstances. Not a married man, I hope?—No?—So much the better, too. In any case, it must be rather a pull upon you, eh? One has to behave pretty handsomely when a man does

all your work for you; and when there's a wife and family one can't leave them altogether out of account."

"Oh, Richards and I settled all that long ago," said the Vicar of Thornton Briars, evasively; "we have no difficulties on that score."

"So much the better. I forgot the exact value of your living. It's a good one, I know; but I suppose the agricultural depression touches you a little, like everyone else. Well, I'm clear of all that, at any rate; the farmers can't take it out of *me*." He sat drumming his knee with one hand for a moment. "We're getting up a subscription," he said then, "and I look to you to help us. We want to build an English church at Schlossberg."

"What's the point of that?" said Mr. Holland; "I thought you always had the use of the German church on Sundays."

"So we have; and a most ridiculous and inconvenient arrangement it is. It's a standing scandal that, in a place like Schlossberg, the English chaplain shouldn't have a church of his own. We are getting up a subscription, and hope to begin building in August; and I look to you, Holland, as a Schlossberg man, to help us."

"I a Schlossberg man!" said Mr. Holland. "I have no desire ever to see the place again."

"Well your sister lives there; doesn't she?—and your uncle? Your sister, by the by, has behaved very handsomely, all things considered; she gave me ten pounds without a word."

"My sister does what she likes with her money," said Mr. Holland, indifferently. "She has plenty to throw away, and is no rule for me; but I was not aware she had the habit of attending the English Church."

"Neither has she. She goes to the German Lutheran, which makes her conduct all the handsomer. So I look to you to give us a helping hand also. No need to trouble about it to-day," as Mr. Holland made no immediate movement of acquiescence; "there will be an opportunity later on. We are going to have a little meeting of people staying in the pension, and their friends: a young lady is going to recite, I believe, or something of the kind; my wife attends to that part of it. I shall give a little address, and there will be a collection. We shall probably not get much; it's extraordinary how backward English people are in drawing their purse-strings when they are abroad; no stimulus, I suppose, of public opinion; but there will

be no expenses, and every little helps. Mrs. Sparrow thought," he said, turning round on Elisabeth, "you might be of some assistance to her in the arrangements."

"That would give me great pleasure," said Elisabeth, smiling. "I would do anything for Mrs. Sparrow, please tell her."

"And you," said the clergyman, turning in his abrupt way to Dulcie; "we should be glad of your assistance also."

"I shall be delighted, of course," said Dulcie, with her usual sweetness; "you must let me know how I can be of help to you. Do tell me about the church that you propose to build, Mr. Sparrow; it interests me very much. It will be *your* church, of course, and a large one, I suppose; in a place like Schlossberg you must certainly have a large congregation?"

Mr. Sparrow looked at her askance, softened for a moment, then hardening again. He had too deep-rooted a disrespect for women, too low an opinion of his fellow-creatures in general, to be at once taken in by any young woman's airs and graces, as he would have termed them.

"Do you know Schlossberg well?" he said to Dulcie.

"Oh, no!" she said, opening her eyes. "I have never been there yet; I only hope to go."

"Then I can't imagine," he said, "why you should take any special interest in the church. Anyhow, you can hear all about it, if you please, in my address." He took up his hat, and rose to go: "The meeting is on Friday week," he said to Elisabeth. "Mrs. Sparrow will be glad to see you."

"Oh, I shall see her, I hope to see her before that," said Elisabeth, wistfully. "Give her my love, please—and to Mary. How is Mary?"

"Mary is very well, I believe—I have not heard that she has any ailment," said Mary's father. "She has grown stouter, that's all." He turned again to his friend: "Well, Holland, take care of yourself," he said; "don't overwork. You're not working now, eh?—not preaching, or anything of that kind?"

"Preaching!" said Mr. Holland. "I have never preached, Sparrow, since that Sunday you were ill at Schlossberg, more than three years ago."

"Not—since——" said Mr. Sparrow. He gazed at his friend for a moment; then grasped his thin white hand in his own vigorous red one, half bowed to the two girls, and

left the room. Five minutes later, Elisabeth, looking from the window, saw him seated in a gondola, reading and marking his pamphlet as he glided through one of the most enchanting scenes the world can show.

There was a brief silence after he left the room. Dulcie, who had taken up her work, kept her eyes fixed on it. Her reflections were of the simplest description; she thought Mr. Holland's friend the rudest and most odious man she had ever come across. She did not, however, give utterance to this sentiment. Elisabeth, on her side, knew Mr. Sparrow too well for surprises; he could only have surprised her, indeed, by any special display of civility; his behaviour did not call for even a mental comment on her part. Mr. Holland was the first to speak.

"My dear," he said, with more irritation of manner than he often showed—his deliberate temper, at once tolerant and dogmatic, rarely hurried him into open irritation—"you would have obliged me by not pledging yourself so heedlessly in the matter of this meeting that Sparrow was speaking about."

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Elisabeth, starting a little. "Do you object to my going? I only thought of assisting Mrs. Sparrow. I dare say I needn't go."

"I object to the whole thing," he said, with the same irritation. "I thought Sparrow had more judgment. There is no necessity—none whatever—that I can see, for building an English church at Schlossberg. At any rate, I chose to have nothing to do with it. There are claims enough upon one at home without subscriptions being forced upon one abroad. I thought Sparrow had more judgment."

Elisabeth was silent for a minute. She perceived, now, the cause of her husband's irritation—perceived it, with a sinking of the heart familiar to her. Dulcie, meanwhile, having already committed herself to an expression of lively interest in the new Schlossberg church, slipped quietly from the room; the amiable habit of agreeing with everyone in turn being inconveniently apt to lead one to some awkward and impossible corner where further agreement becomes impracticable.

"I don't think I need go," said Elisabeth, after a pause. "I can make an excuse to Mrs. Sparrow; she is very kind to me always."

"That," said Mr. Holland, speaking with less irritation and with more of his usual deliberate gravity, "would be

a reason to keep the engagement, not to break it. Certainly you must go, since you have said you will. But don't let either Sparrow or his wife imagine they are going to build their church with my money. Give them your time, if you please, but make them understand I'm not going to subscribe. In fact, if you give your time, that is sufficient. They have no right to expect any more."

He took up his newspaper and settled himself to read again. Happily for Elisabeth, she disliked discussion; the last word had hardly any charm for her. But at the close of this day, on which she had arisen feeling that life in Venice might mean, after all, only a rather hopeless monotony, she found herself with two engagements on her hands, neither of which she could be certain had her husband's approval. Of that with Gordon Temple, indeed, she had not found occasion to speak; on the whole, she had decided to give it up without speaking of it at all. Her husband's words that afternoon had been too wounding; she would rather, she thought, leave every stone in Venice unvisited, than give him cause to continue in that tone.

When Gordon arrived, therefore, the following afternoon, he was shown into an empty sitting-room, and left waiting there for what seemed to him an interminable time. He had sent in his name to Mrs. Holland; but it must have been nearly half an hour before Elisabeth appeared in her out-door dress, pulling on her gloves. They were shabby little three-button gloves; Elisabeth was not without high aspirations, as we know, but there were moments when it seemed to her that one would be not far removed from the ultimate summit of earthly bliss through the possession of a dozen pair of new gloves buttoning half-way up the arm.

"I am so sorry—I have kept you waiting," she said, in her shy embarrassed fashion.

"Not at all; I am glad you can go," said Gordon, glancing at her. He had the suspicion—he had, in fact, always the suspicion now—that something unpleasant had passed between her and her husband.

"Yes, I can go," said Elisabeth, with extreme awkwardness; and without further speech, led the way to the door. This half-hour, in fact, during which Gordon had been exercising his patience in the empty salottino, had been one of the most intimate discomfort to Elisabeth. Having decided not to accept Gordon's invitation, she had

said nothing about it to her husband. It was useless—it was useless, that was what she said to herself, to bring up subjects that might be simply matters of contention. She wrote, therefore, a few lines to Gordon, intending, should he call or send to the door—she had neglected to inform herself of his address—to let him have the note by Maddelena. Her Italian was still too imperfect for any clear explanation of the matter beforehand. What she had not calculated upon (though, in truth, nothing could be more natural) was that his visit should be announced and his card brought in whilst she was sitting with her husband. They were in their own room, and she was engaged in copying a long letter for him. Dulcie was out; this remarkable event, the first of its kind in that young lady's career in Venice, having been brought about by the fact that a schoolfellow of hers, lately married, and with whom she was in correspondence, had found her out and invited her to join a party to the Lido. Elisabeth, left alone with her husband, set herself to write with the pleasure she always felt when he was willing to entrust her with anything to do for him. She asked little better of their common life now than an hour like this, when she had him to herself, and could feel she was essential to his comfort. She was simply disconcerted when Maddelena, bringing in Gordon Temple's card, explained by various gestures that the gentleman was waiting in the salottino. Mr. Holland's attention was aroused; he took the card and examined it.

"Gordon, I see, has called again," he said. "Is it by your request, my dear, that he makes his visits of such frequency?"

"No; oh no! I must explain," said Elisabeth, flushing. "He asked me yesterday if I would go out with him this afternoon; I told you that he said his gondola was at our disposal. He said he would call to know if I would go——" She broke down in miserable embarrassment; she felt a criminal without knowing why. Mr. Holland surveyed her with gravity.

"If Gordon is here, you had better not keep him waiting," he said. "There is nothing that need detain you."

"But I don't want to go," said Elisabeth; "I had written him a note to say so. I meant to send it down when he called." She passed the note across the table, but her husband took no notice of it.

"I perceive," he said, "that you have made some engagement, and I should wish you to keep it. You treat

engagements too lightly, Elisabeth ; you will oblige me by keeping this one."

"There was no engagement," cried Elisabeth, "none whatever. I shouldn't, of course, have made one without first consulting you. It was only because I had decided not to go that I said nothing about it."

She took up the pen she had laid down, as if to recommence writing. Mr. Holland sat silent for a moment, smoothing down his mustache.

"Another time," he said, "it will be better for you to refer your decision at once to me. I shall then know better what I am about. There is no harm done, however ; I am very willing—I request, in fact, that you should go. That letter is of no immediate importance ; in any case, Dulcie can finish it for me when she comes in."

Elisabeth's cheeks flamed. "If you wish it, I will go," she said ; "but I will finish the letter first." She began writing with an impetuosity that scattered the ink over the page. She tore it in half, took another sheet, and began again. She had the consciousness that her husband's eyes were upon her ; she had the consciousness that she was behaving like a schoolgirl ; but she felt as if neither heaven nor earth should move her to leave the completion of her task to Dulcie. Mr. Holland, having contemplated her for a moment in silence, dropped his eyes without speaking ; and this silence, that set her in the wrong, without giving her the chance of self-justification, was intolerable to Elisabeth.

"It would be absurd," she said, looking up as she turned the last page, "that the letter should be in two handwritings. The least I can do is to finish it."

Her words, so far as her husband was concerned, might have been left unspoken ; he made no response whatever. Elisabeth finished her copy, passed it across the table for his signature, and left the room to put on her hat. In another moment she was seized by compunction ; her own conduct seemed hateful to her. Elisabeth, like most of us, had a fine ideal of herself, which (as in some of us) differed so widely from the reality, that she was perpetually falling from one remorse to another. She put on her hat quickly, and went back to the room where she had left her husband. He was moving about in his feeble way, looking for some book or paper he wanted to take with him into the sitting-room. Elisabeth watched a moment in silence.

"Can I help you?" she said then, timidly.

He made no answer, but continued his search. She went up to him and laid her fingers gently on his arm.

"I am sorry," she said; "I didn't mean to vex you."

He moved his arm from her touch, but did not immediately respond. "My dear," he said at last, "does it never occur to you that I am getting a little tired of these scenes?"

Elisabeth shrank back as if she had been struck; she said nothing, but left the room. Outside the sitting-room door she paused, pressing back some tears, pulling her little black net veil down over her eyes. She could not look happy, but she looked sufficiently composed as she greeted her visitor. Something like despair was at her heart and checked her utterance; but she gave no other sign.

That was how it was that Gordon was kept waiting nearly half an hour in the empty sitting-room. Elisabeth led the way down the great staircase to the door opening on to the side canal, where the gondola, with a striped awning, lay awaiting them at the water-steps. The tide was rising, and one or two of the steps were already covered. Gordon sprang into the boat, and held out his hand to help Elisabeth across the narrow plank that bridged the watery space. She thanked him as she took her place at his side with a dim and forlorn smile, the best that she could muster at the moment. He felt certain now that something unpleasant had passed between herself and her husband; her expression was quite different from what it had been yesterday, though it had not struck him as being especially cheerful then. He was afraid their expedition had been spoilt beforehand by that brute of a parson, as he mentally designated his cousin. But he arranged a cushion for Elisabeth, and asked her where they should go.

"What would you like to see first, Mrs. Holland?" he said. "Tell me what you would like."

"Oh, you know best," said Elisabeth, not very cheerfully. "I mean, you know the different places—where it is best to go first. Unless—" she went on, trying to rally her spirits, "I think, if you don't mind, I would rather not go to any sights to-day. What I want most of all is to see Venice."

"Ah, you're right there," he said; "Venice is what is best worth seeing at Venice. Besides, it is rather late in the day for sight-seeing. We will make a round."

He leaned back and gave some order to the gondolier. The boat swung round, and with the slow splash of the oar, emerged on to the Grand Canal. Elisabeth sat almost silent, struggling only to respond with some decent grace to the remarks her companion made from time to time. She could have cried to think that this moment, which should have been an almost ideal moment, the moment of first seeing Venice, should have been so spoilt and disfigured. Like most people of an imaginative turn, Elisabeth attached an immense value to impressions; to miss a delightful hour in life—she had known so few as yet—was to her what losing a bag of sovereigns might be to another. Gradually, however, the enchantment of the scene around her asserted itself with an importance that, for the moment, effaced every other consideration. She forgot the unheroic miseries of her life, its dreary shortcomings; she only remembered she was in Venice. Her companion saw her change of mood in the flush on her cheek, the rallying light in her eye, as she turned now and again to him for information or sympathy. Presently she forgot him also, as the gondola, leaving the Grand Canal, swayed slowly round into those narrower waterways that, to the lover of Venice, are dearer, even, than the great spectacle where the beautiful city looks in splendor across the lagoons to the Adriatic. She said nothing whatever; and Gordon, noting her absorption in the entertainment he had provided for her, felt that he had gained his end. He had wanted to give her an hour's respite from the life he partly knew, partly guessed at; and he had succeeded. Presently, as they passed from the chill and narrow of the Bridge of Sighs to the luminous watery breadths, the golden light, to that famous spectacular effect which, true to his duty as cicerone, Gordon had kept to the last, Elisabeth turned her eyes on him again.

"I—I never imagined, I never could have imagined," she said, "anything so beautiful as Venice."

They were nearing the Casa Holland now, and already —it seemed so to Gordon—a faint cloud of weariness, of sadness, began to settle down upon her face. She turned to him as the boat stopped at the water-door.

"I hope it is not very late," she said anxiously; "we have not been out a great while, have we?"

"No, no, it is not at all late," he answered; "we have been out little more than an hour. I won't come up and

see Robert now, though; that must be for another day. And another day I hope you will allow me the pleasure of showing you something more."

"Thank you," she said; "I should like it; I never enjoyed anything so much as this afternoon. But I cannot be sure about going; Robert might want me."

"Of course, he must want you a great deal," said Gordon, rather absently. He stood looking down for a moment at the faint wash of the green water against the doorstep. "I am about to write to my father," he said then, "I hope I may tell him that you like Venice. He will be sure to want to know."

"If you do, you must also tell him, please, how much of the pleasure I owe to you," she said, with a shy and charming smile. The next moment she disappeared within the shadows of the vast and dusky entry.

CHAPTER XXX.

ELISABETH SEES VENICE.

When Elisabeth at last succeeded in paying Mrs. Sparrow a visit, she found her hardly changed in the least by three years' additional wear and tear; though the constant problem of that good lady's existence, the cutting of the raiment of life out of insufficient material, had not grown less acute since their last meeting. She received Elisabeth with open arms, tempered, as it were, by criticism.

"Well, my dear Elisabeth," she said, embracing her, and then contemplating her at arm's length; "I am glad to see you; it gives me much pleasure, my dear, a great deal of pleasure, I assure you."

"I am glad to see you, too," said Elisabeth, putting her hand again into that of the friendly woman. The interview took place in the dining-room of Frau Werner's pension, a somewhat barely-furnished apartment, with a high arched and curtained doorway leading into an adjoining room. A murmur of voices came from behind the curtain, but it was closely drawn, and Elisabeth had not on this occasion been invited to pass it. She had been left alone for awhile to the contemplation of a long narrow dining-table, laid for about a dozen people, with heavy knives and forks and plates, with substantial linen and solid tumblers,

and a dismal little dessert. The whole reminded her strangely of Schlossberg; it was like a homely German picture hung on a Venetian wall. For though the windows did not command the Grand Canal, they looked out on a narrow waterway, separated from the house by a small and sunny garden, with a pergola and some acacias, and rose-trees flowering against an old red brick wall. A mass of green overtopped the wall; one could fancy it hanging low above the water on the other side. Beyond the wall could be seen the canal, with a gondola lying black and empty against some steps, and a barge laden with fresh-cut grass that went sliding lazily by, stirring into quivering pools of light and color the water that washed against more red-brick walls with dilapidated and falling stucco, with the cool shadow of an arched doorway, and stone balconies set with trees in tubs. It was one of those glimpses, whose intimate charm delights the spectator, in the heart of Venice; it delighted Elisabeth, who had time to study it in all its details before the dining-room door opened, and Mrs. Sparrow entered with the greeting already given.

"We shall stay here, my dear, if you please," she said, drawing forward one of the straw-seated chairs. "There is a little Bible-class going on just now in the sitting-room; a few earnest young Christians we have been able to gather together. We do our best wherever we may be; but it is uphill work to fight the battle in an idolatrous land, and Venice is a most worldly place. Well, my dear, and now let me look at you. Why, you have grown, Elisabeth, decidedly grown—and—and improved."

"Oh!" said Elisabeth, coloring and laughing a little. "Yes, I know that I have grown," she said; "I am much taller than when I left Schlossberg."

"Grown in mind also, I trust," said Mrs. Sparrow. "There was room for it, my dear Elisabeth. You married far too young, my dear. If I could have had you for a year or two to myself, to train you carefully, as I have trained Mary, it would have been much, much better for you. A child of your age had no business to get married."

"I was eighteen," said Elisabeth, a little wistfully.

"Only just eighteen, and very childish for your years; I never knew a young girl of eighteen more childish for her years. You will admit that, I think, my dear."

"Yes," said Elisabeth, slowly, looking down at her hands, "I think I was a child; I was too young. I didn't very

well know what I was doing. But I am not a child now," she added, looking up.

"I should hope not, my dear—I should hope not, indeed, after being three years a wife, and a clergyman's wife, too. I wish I could feel sure, Elisabeth, that you have properly felt the responsibilities and privileges of your position. I shall want you to tell me all about your parish, your schools and your clothing clubs and your mothers' meetings. I am always deeply interested in the working of such matters, and I shall like Mary to hear about them also. It is my constant regret that there is so little scope for them in these foreign chaplaincies."

Elisabeth felt her heart contract with a dreary pang; she wished Mrs. Sparrow would not talk about Thornton Briars; a chill breath from that melancholy home seemed to pass by and darken Venice. "I am afraid," she said in answer, "that I don't know as much as I ought about all these things. We are a great deal away, you know, from Thornton Briars; and when we are there I don't like to trouble my husband to tell me about them. How is Mary?" she added hastily, anxious to avert the reproof she saw gathering on Mrs. Sparrow's brow.

"Mary is well," said Mrs. Sparrow, austerely. "I am grieved, my dear, I am more than grieved to hear you speak in this way of matters of so much importance. Who should know about all these things, as you term them, but the vicar's wife? So far as her husband's parish extends, his wife must necessarily be the first personage in it, and paramount in everything save those actual offices of the church from which women are excluded. It is that, my dear Elisabeth, which marks off the clergyman's wife from that of any other profession, and gives her position such high significance; there is, I may say, no point that concerns her husband's business on which her word is not of value. But we will speak no more of this at present," Mrs. Sparrow added, with benignity; "we shall, I trust, have many future opportunities. You were asking about Mary; Mary is well, thank you, though she has had some sad hours since you last saw her."

"Mary has?" said Elisabeth, surprised.

"Yes, my dear. It is not everyone who has your happy fortune, your opportunities in life. I can talk to you freely on these matters now you are a married woman, my dear Elisabeth, and I may confide to you that Mary has had a sad disappointment. You remember Herr Nauders, per-

haps, the young student who was at Frau Werner's that winter."

"Oh, yes," said Elisabeth, smiling; "he admired Mary very much, I used to think."

"Indeed, my dear? I was not aware you thought of such matters at all in those days. Yes, he admired Mary very much, and she liked him; there is no doubt of that, poor child! Her father and I both thought it a settled matter, and we should not have disapproved—not at all. It was not all we could have wished: an English parish, an English vicarage like yours, Elisabeth—that is what I could really desire for Mary. Still, this young man was about to take orders in his own Church, a pure Protestant evangelical branch, and there need have been no difficulty about money. His parents are rich—they live at Hamburg—and Mr. Sparrow would not have been exacting. However, it was not to be. Herr Nauders left at the end of the season, and we have heard nothing of him since."

"I think it was very ungrateful of him," said Elisabeth. "I mean apart from Mary. You were so kind to him, Mrs. Sparrow."

"Ah, my dear, kindness——" said Mrs. Sparrow. "No, we heard nothing more of him. Mary bore it as a young Christian girl should; but it was a trial to her, of course, poor child—it was a trial. However, there is an overruling Providence that governs everything for the best; and we often live to be thankful for the disappointment of our hopes, though you are too young yet, Elisabeth, and too fortunate, to have learned all the Christian's lessons of experience. There were no difficulties in *your* way my dear."

"No," said Elisabeth, slowly, "there were no difficulties in my way." She sat still for a moment. "I am so sorry for Mary," she said, then, rising to go, "is she out? I should so like to see her again."

"She is not out; she is engaged at present with the Bible-class," said Mary's mother; "it might be profitable, my dear Elisabeth, if you could join it also. No? You are too much engaged with your husband? Well, I have nothing to say against that, my dear; one's first duty, after all, is to one's husband. That, at least, I trust you have learned, Elisabeth?"

"I hope so," said Elisabeth, smiling a little dimly. A momentary longing came over her to confide in the friendly woman before her—a woman who, with all her

shortcomings, had had the experience of more than twenty years of married life—how her own life seemed to grow more difficult every day, whilst an importunate light, shining as it were through closed eyes, illuminated her husband and herself, showing failure, divergence, and differences at every step. But confidences came with difficulty from Elisabeth ; and the moment the impulse was past, she was glad she had not yielded to it. After all, Mrs. Sparrow was not the person whom, in a calmer moment, she would select as a counsellor ; and in any case, silence, not confidences, was always best in life.

"I hope so," she repeated, rallying from her brief silence. "At any rate, I must go now, Mrs. Sparrow ; my husband may be wanting me. Will you give my love to Frau Werner ? I can't stop to see her to-day ; but she was so kind to me, always. Her children are not here, are they ?"

"Mercifully not !" said Mrs. Sparrow, with emphasis. "To have those noisy, unruly children here would be intolerable. We have already far too much to put up with as it is. Frau Werner has been sadly spoiled by prosperity ; I cannot say we experience half the consideration she showed us when we first came to her. And now that that objectionable Mrs. Cleaver has returned and occupies the best apartment, our little society has been entirely spoiled. We were a small, but I may say truly harmonious party, before she came ; every arrangement that Mr. Sparrow and myself, after our long residence in the house, thought ourselves entitled to suggest, was cheerfully acquiesced in ; but since her arrival there has been nothing but discord. Everything has been disarranged to suit her convenience, from the seats at the table to the little service we had instituted in this room, every evening, to conclude the day with blessing. You probably don't remember Mrs. Cleaver, Elisabeth ; she left, I believe, just after you came, or perhaps, indeed, before."

"I am not sure," said Elisabeth, doubtfully ; "there were so many people at the pension. Yes, I think I remember her ; and that I did not like her at all."

"No one could like her," said Mrs. Sparrow, with decision ; "a most objectionable person. She even tried to interfere with this little meeting and recital for the benefit of our new church that we are to have on Friday next. 'Frau Werner,' she said in my presence—actually in my presence, 'if Mr. Sparrow wants to hold a meeting, he had

better have it in his own room. The salon is for public, not private use.' 'Frau Werner,' I said, I will remind you that I have your promise for the use of the salon. If Mrs. Cleaver doesn't like to attend, there is a simple remedy—she can stay away!' 'I choose to sit in the salon, at my own hour and at my own pleasure,' said Mrs. Cleaver —Frau Werner didn't know how to look, for we already had her promise."

"Oh, that is dreadful!" said Elisabeth; "I don't think the pension can be nearly so nice as it used to be. I am glad we had not come here—except on your account dear Mrs. Sparrow," kissing that woman of many trials.

"Well, my dear Elisabeth, it would have given me pleasure had it been ruled that we should be together again for a time; it might not have been unprofitable, I think, to you. You were a sad heedless girl—too heedless, my dear, both for your temporal and spiritual welfare; though, indeed, as regards the former, Providence has left little to be desired—and I cannot see that married life has changed you so much as your true friends could wish. I should have rejoiced had you been able to join our little Bible-class; but I may at least count upon you for Friday. Your husband, I fear, might not feel equal to coming—no, no; I quite understand that. I was grieved to hear from Mr. Sparrow how ill he is looking. But I count upon *you*, Elisabeth. A person in your position has an influence for good or for ill that can hardly be over-estimated. Christian humility is very well in its place; but to neglect the opportunities for example and edification belonging to the station in which Providence has placed us is not humility; it is sinful neglect."

Elisabeth, as she walked slowly homeward from the Pension Werner, did not feel at all like a person of position, though she had never accredited herself with much Christian humility. She felt like a person who had been scolded! The experience had left her somewhat depressed. The sort of halo with which memory and imagination had invested everything belonging to her days at Schlossberg had surrounded Mrs. Sparrow's head also with a little circle of glory. But Mrs. Sparrow was not a woman to carry such an ornament with grace; such saint-like attributes as she might possess—and she was not without them, poor soul—by no means translated themselves into pictorial effects. In brief, Elisabeth's transfiguring memory had promised her that in finding Mrs. Sparrow again

she would find a friend whose wisdom she could trust, whose sympathy and discretion she could rely on; and she had found only Mrs. Sparrow, with whom she had never had a single idea in common, grateful though she had been to her for many kindnesses. She walked on in the glowing sunshine, that never glowed too hotly for her, a slim figure in her cool gray dress and shady black straw hat, feeling that life had presented her with one more disillusion. Life had many disillusions on hand, it would appear—only not Venice! She had discovered by this time that it is possible to walk all over Venice, and she had walked a good deal in these last days. Once only had she been able to induce her husband to go out in a gondola, and that experiment had not been repeated; he was, in fact, one of those strangely luckless people to whom the motion of the gondola is unpleasant; and any enjoyment he might have derived from a larger acquaintance with Venice would have been quite insufficient to compensate for the attendant discomfort. He was, for that matter, quite content to sit day after day at the window of the sitting-room, contemplating the shining and splendid view spread out before him; and Elisabeth, finding this to be the case, ceased to urge him to further exertion. In this she was guided in part by the advice of Gordon Temple, who paid them a visit from time to time, and saw little sign of that renewed strength in his cousin Robert of which the hope was animating his cousin's wife. In his eyes, though he did not say so, Robert Holland was a dying man. "Don't urge your husband to go out," he said one day to Elisabeth, who had accompanied him into the ante-room; "you have plenty of air and sunshine in your rooms—you couldn't be better situated in that respect—and it's my belief that he gains more good by sitting there quietly than he would by going out." After that, Elisabeth urged her husband no more; but she went out every day herself. Miss Fawcett—her friends had left Venice for a short excursion on the mainland—could seldom be induced to stir; and the friction induced by three people not in perfect harmony living together would be unbearable, Elisabeth presently protested to herself, without some change of ideas on the part of one of them. She at least, she felt, could not bear it! She went out, therefore, to look at Venice with a sense of self-indulgence tempered by a sense of penitential remorse at the extraordinary dislike she felt in leaving her husband to be entertained by

Dulcie. She would have felt little less remorse had she stayed at home with a view to interfering with that entertainment. The whole matter was become a perplexed torment to her; she was not incapable of seeing that it might be taken simply; but to take it simply had passed beyond her power. It was inconceivable to her—though that mattered little—that anyone should be so indifferent to Venice as Dulcie showed herself to be. Only once had she exhibited any special interest in it, on the occasion of one of Gordon Temple's visits when she happened to be present. Miss Fawcett's conversation on that occasion was in the highest degree animated and intelligent; she expressed the liveliest desire to see every part of Venice, to become acquainted with every artistic and historic treasure it contained. If Gordon did not on the spot place himself and his gondola at her disposal during the remainder of her stay, it was not, to put it plainly, Miss Dulcie's fault.

Gordon, as a fact, never once thought of doing anything of the kind. He did not like Miss Fawcett; he found her pretentious and underbred now, as she had appeared to him on their first introduction to each other at Thornton Briars; and he was, moreover, preoccupied with Elisabeth, to a degree that would have made him indifferent to fascinations much more potent than poor Dulcie's. He continued to find an extreme charm in her; if she would have occupied his gondola, either with or without his company, she might have done so all day long; but though he more than once made her the offer of its use, she invariably declined it. She gave him no very definite reason for doing so; she had none very definite to give herself; she simply felt sure her husband would prefer that she should. Gordon, who would have declared with some emphasis that he was not in the least in love with her—it did not lie at all within his scheme of life to fall in love with his cousin's, or with any other man's wife—found that she continued to interest him to a degree that made him begin to calculate, at the conclusion of each visit, how soon he might find an excuse to pay another. She interested him both in what he understood, still more than what he did not understand of her life; in her impulses and her reticences, in her curious unripeness, which still gave her at times the air of a schoolgirl confronting life in the rashest ignorance of its problems; in her attitude toward her husband, of which he had at once divined the loyalty and the sadness. As

his cousin's wife, he had the profoundest compassion for her. The marriage should never have been allowed, he said to himself again and again at this time; Robert Holland's family should have prevented it. What right had he had, or Emilia, or any one belonging to it, to sit by and see an ignorant girl of eighteen sacrifice herself to a sick man nearly twenty years her senior, when they knew, too —when they knew, he said angrily to himself one evening after he had left them—that it was for her money he had married her? It had been a sin, it had been a crime; looking back, he found it impossible to understand his own indifference. All these sentiments he communicated the next day in an immense letter to Emilia; a letter that made Madame von Waldorf raise her eyebrows with a certain surprise. She was accustomed to her cousin's vagaries; but this tone, adopted in regard to Elisabeth, surprised and, to a certain extent, displeased her. After all —after all, she said to herself, searching her memory, she had remonstrated as far as was possible—almost beyond, it had seemed to her, the bounds of discretion; she had said what she could to Elisabeth. After all, too, it had not been for them to interfere; it was for her own people, and they had consented willingly enough. All this she wrote in answer to Gordon; but when she had written it, she tore the letter up. Gordon was not always perfectly reasonable in his moods, and when that was the case she preferred to humor rather than to argue with him. As a fact, however, she hardly knew how to humor his present mood; what did he want her to do or to say? The touch of extravagance in his letter displeased her; Emilia disliked extravagance and unruly sentiment of all kinds; and though she might condone these more readily in her cousin than in anyone else, she finally, in her answer, rather evaded the main points in his letter, touching on Elisabeth and her affairs as lightly as possible.

"I was intending to write to you, dear Gordon," so her words ran, "when your letter arrived. I am grieved by your account of Robert. Elisabeth's letters lately have spoken of a good deal of improvement in his health; but I know so well how deceptive the fluctuations of illness are to anyone in constant attendance on an invalid, that I am disposed to accept your opinion in preference to hers. Poor Robert! and poor Elisabeth—I never saw a girl more absolutely in love with the man she was about to marry:

so far she is happy, of course; but, of course, also, that only deepens the sadness to her now of Robert's illness, and she is almost too young for such a responsibility. Yes, as you say, she married too young. I wish they could have come to Schlossberg for the summer, rather than have gone to Venice; but I hope to arrange some plan by which I may be able to see Robert, and Aunt Irma, I know, adheres to her idea of going to Venice before the weather there becomes intolerably hot. She is Elisabeth's best friend; I shall feel more easy when I know she is near her.

"Your father has been a little ailing this day or two, but is now fairly well again. He—we are all looking forward to seeing you again before very long. Ida is working a great surprise for you; she desires me to tell you so much, but not a word more. She wants you to go on guessing what it is until you come.

"Yours affectionately,

"EMILIA."

Gordon, on reading this letter, crumpled it up and flung it into the canal along which he happened to be passing in his gondola. He immediately fished it out again, however, and thrust it into his pocket; but he said to himself that when Emilia set herself to write a letter dictated by feminine spite, no one could do it better. This was hard upon the letter, which was certainly innocent enough; but it is not to be denied that Madame von Waldorf, who had been disturbed by the tone of Gordon's effusion, had allowed a certain tinge of malice to creep both into her expressions and her reticences. She had intended to conciliate Gordon; on the whole, it had been easier to provoke him a little. It was the paragraph about Elisabeth that provoked him the most. It was cold-hearted, he said to himself; it was simply heartless to write mere phrases when the warmest sympathy was demanded; it was pure affectation to suggest that after three years' experience of a man like Robert Holland, the attitude of a girl who had married him at eighteen could be the same toward him as before their marriage. It was, to some extent, a direct consequence of this letter that, his day's work ended, he resolved to call at the Casa Holland. He had always, in a sense, to make up his mind to call there. His cousin Robert's welcome could hardly be termed genial, and he could not be always certain that his presence afforded pleasure to

his cousin's wife. In general, there seemed to be something of thunder in the air. His point of view, indeed, that Elisabeth was the victim of his own family—a point of view almost as unreasonable as Madame von Waldorf held it to be—was simply the formula by which he explained his visits to himself. If Elisabeth had suffered through them, it devolved on him, so far as possible, to redeem the situation. The conclusion was, on the whole, as unreasonable as the premises ; but reason, so far as has been ascertained, has never yet been the exclusive guide of susceptible mortals. Madame von Waldorf, one of the most reasonable of her sex, was not incapable of yielding to an impulse that reflection would have told her would have an effect directly opposite to that she might wish to produce. It was, I say, a not indirect consequence of her letter that Gordon determined to pay a visit that evening to the Casa Holland. He postponed it, however, until after the table-d'hôte dinner at his hotel. The invalid hours kept by his cousin baffled him a little ; he seemed to be always stumbling on some incongruous meal. He thought he remembered, however, that they had changed their supper hour in Venice to nine o'clock, and at a little before eight he had himself rowed up to the water-door of the old palazzo.

On entering the sitting-room he found himself in what he at once felt to be an atmosphere of unusual tranquillity. Miss Fawcett was not visible, and Gordon, presently inquiring for her, learnt that she was absent ; she had gone that morning to spend a few days with the schoolfellow already mentioned ; they were to visit Padua and Bologna and other cities on the mainland before the extreme heat set in. Gordon wondered whether the unwonted placidity he seemed to perceive were due to Miss Dulcie's absence ; had it been possible for him to ask Elisabeth, she might have unhesitatingly replied that it was. To her, the departure of Dulcie for even a few days was the removal of a weight so heavy, it left her spirits so free, her conscience so clear, that she was not far, for the moment, from laying all the troubles of her married life on that young lady's slim shoulders ; the more so that her husband happened to be in an unusually cheerful and equable mood. The cause of that mood was, as a fact, complex, and not to be laid to Dulcie's charge alone. In the first place, Mr. Holland was feeling unusually well. It was one of those rare days, known to all invalids, when some secret spring

of strength seems touched, giving good hope of future recovery ; and the sad experience that a few hours will see the end of the strength, the fading of the hope, has nothing to say to the relief of the moment. In the next place, he missed Dulcie exceedingly, and a point of good feeling, aided by his passing cheerfulness, persuaded him to keep the sentiment to himself. He was very fond of Dulcie, as has been said ; in many ways, and for reasons that have been given, he preferred her society to that of his wife, and he saw no reason in morality or conduct why he should not ; she admired him more, she entertained him better. But of the two, he would have missed Elisabeth the most ; she had become the more necessary to his comfort. It did not occur to Mr. Holland that he had latterly given his wife little reason to think so—the fact had not escaped Dulcie ; it was a root of bitterness to that young lady, little suspected by Elisabeth—but it did occur to him vaguely that she might sometimes have cause for annoyance in the preference that he gave, and occasionally through pure perversity, to Dulcie over herself. The preference, in the points selected, was a perfectly just one, he would have said ; but Mr. Holland had a conscience, and the perversity now and again found him out. His conscience, at any rate, urged him to the grace of being more than usually amiable to his wife that evening, that she might not immediately discover how much he missed that third person, whose presence Elisabeth had found so proverbially incommodious.

"Well, my dear," he said, with an accent of kindness, as she handed him his tea ; "so here we are, Darby and Joan again."

Elisabeth smiled a little in answer without speaking. The relief to her was immense—Dulcie's absence, this hour of kindness with her husband ; and yet almost immediately she felt a sense of restraint settling down upon her. These hours were becoming too rare, the intervals separating them too long ; she was baffled by memories of all the discordant moments that lay between. A word wrongly placed, and the discord might begin again. Elisabeth always lived a good deal in the emotion of the hour. She forgot readily—she forgot, indeed, too readily, since she was apt to repeat her errors of judgment ; but this lesson of experience she had been three years in learning, and it could hardly be unlearnt again. She was extraordinarily rash by nature in plucking the flower of the moment to

see it wither in her hand; but with Mr. Holland she had learnt—especially in these last few weeks she had learnt—something of prudence. A load was lifted from her, and yet she felt rather sad, and uncertain what to do. She was glad to remember that Mr. Sparrow had promised to come in later and have an hour's talk with her husband. She offered to read aloud meanwhile, but Mr. Holland was indisposed for that entertainment.

"I don't know," he said, "a higher enjoyment than to sit here at this hour and contemplate the view. I don't know anything pleasanter. It seems to me, my dear, that you don't appreciate this view as you should."

"Oh, I do," said Elisabeth; "it is more beautiful than anything I could have imagined." She went and stood behind him for a moment, looking out at the wide scene glowing in a light that grew more golden from one moment to another as the day declined; then she turned away. It was too lovely; it dazzled her mind as the sun might have dazzled her eyes. She took up her work, and sitting down by her husband, began to sew.

It was on this placid scene that Gordon entered. Arriving in this more genial moment, he was received with greater cordiality than Mr. Holland often showed; and the sight of him sitting there, pallid, languid, a doomed man, yet with something of cheerful content in his air, moved Gordon to more sympathy than he could always summon up for his cousin, whatever pity he might feel for a fellow-creature in so sad a strait. He made some commonplace remark about the beauty of the evening.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Holland; "and I'm beginning to think you have not said too much of Venice. This is my way of enjoying it, you know, and I can't imagine one much better on the whole. Here I sit and see it all without stirring from my chair; no trouble of running about with guide-books."

"Oh, you're quite right," said Gordon. "People give themselves a great deal too much trouble with guide-books. But you're uncommonly lucky in your quarters, you know; here you have the finest view in Venice before you, without, as you say, the trouble of going to look for it. Still, there are one or two points I should have been glad to take you to see, if you had liked the motion of the gondola better. All this represents what is most splendid in Venice; but there are other things besides."

"Ah, that's what my wife says," said Mr. Holland. "You told us—what was it you told us Elisabeth? About some odd corner you had found. My wife walks about a great deal, you know: she declares you can walk all over Venice."

"I was hoping," said Gordon, turning to Elisabeth with some hesitation in his voice, "that I might, perhaps, induce you to come out with me for a little while this evening. You have not been on the lagoons at all, I think, and this is about the best moment for them."

"Go, my dear, by all means," said Mr. Holland, as Elisabeth involuntarily turned her eyes on him before answering. "Why not? I never mind being left alone, as you know. Besides, Sparrow will be coming in presently."

"I should like to go," said Elisabeth, turning her head toward Gordon with one of her diffident, fleeting smiles. "But I don't like to leave you," she immediately added, addressing her husband.

"No, no, my dear, I should wish you to go; I should wish you to see what you can," he replied. "It does very well for me," he continued, as Elisabeth, still half reluctantly, rose and left the room to put on her hat—"it does for me to sit here quietly; but my wife is young—she likes to run about and see all that is to be seen."

"Naturally," said Gordon, not knowing exactly what to say. He wondered what was the immediate cause of his cousin's affable mood; it struck him as a little forced, as not quite genuine, a trifle sinister, in fact. In this he did great injustice to Mr. Holland, who was very well pleased with his own efforts to be amiable; they did not always seem possible to him where his wife was concerned. When Elisabeth presently returned, pulling on her shabby little gloves, and sadly conscious that when she stepped into the gondola she would exhibit a shabby, though pretty little boot, he addressed her in the same tone of kindness.

"Take care of yourself, my dear," he said; "I hope you will have a pleasant time. You needn't hurry back, you know."

"No, it would be a pity to hurry back," said Gordon; "for what I propose," he continued to Elisabeth, as they moved toward the door, "is to row out toward the Lido, and return to Venice after dusk. There is no moon to-night, unluckily I suppose I should say; but, to my mind, no city can dispense better with a moon than Venice. I

don't mean that it doesn't adorn the moonlight when the moonlight is there!"

"Yes, I should like that," said Elisabeth, with a certain eagerness; "that is what Miss Fawcett's friends were saying, when they called yesterday—that she ought to row out toward the Lido, and return after sunset."

"Oh, it is not an original idea," said her companion, smiling; "I am afraid it's the thing to do; but in this case the thing happens to be very well worth doing. So you have lost Miss Fawcett," he continued, presently, when they had taken their seats in the gondola; "you miss her, perhaps."

Elisabeth did not at once answer. "I don't know," she said then.

She turned away her head as she spoke, which added to the flatness of the response, and seemed to preclude further discussion of the subject. Gordon had by this time become accustomed to these sudden drops in conversation with Elisabeth. They had disconcerted him at first; but since, when we are charmed with a person, our first pleasure lies in finding a charm in everything that he or she does, he had ended by liking these somewhat abrupt and unconventional shocks. He changed the subject.

"Robert was looking well this evening," he said, rather hesitatingly; then wondered why he had told such a lie. It was a lie in the sense that it might induce in her the deception that his cousin was radically better. She turned her face to him again immediately, however.

"You thought so? I am glad," she said. "I thought so, too. Venice has done a great deal for him."

Her words were cheerful, but her face did not light up as it sometimes did when she spoke of her hope of his recovery. She leaned back in the gondola, looking down at her folded hands. Mr. Holland had rather overacted his amiability, perhaps; for it had impressed his wife, also, with a vague sense of unreality and discomfort. Presently, however, as on a former occasion when she had gone out with Gordon, the scene around her drew all her thoughts to itself. They had left the city behind them, and were half rowing, half floating toward the Lido. The sun had set, not in flaming splendor, but in serene gold; and the luminous twilight, the warm mysterious blue of the dusk, fell on the far-reaching waters like a gentle benediction. The two talked at intervals as they floated along. Elisabeth told her companion of how she had first

come abroad as a girl ; she had thought it, she said, smiling, the most wonderful thing that could happen to anyone, and she thought so still ; she told him how one thing and another had impressed her. She talked quickly and shyly, with lapses into silence, as though she already repented of her partial confidences, till some word from her companion brought her to speak again. Presently they both fell silent, as though hushed into harmony with the great stillness that surrounded them, interrupted only by the occasional splash of the oar as the gondolier urged the boat forward again. They had turned and were drifting back toward Venice now, to where the lights of the city shone distant beyond the silent spaces around them. Vague reflections trembled on the vast liquid plain, at once gray and luminous ; the stars were beginning to thicken overhead ; the long lines of the sentinel piles stood up dark against the sky, shifting and moving slowly, as it seemed, to accompany their movement ; but beyond, remote, motionless, like the entrance to another world unvexed by earthly storms, the islands stood ranged on the horizon, fading before their eyes into the remoter dusk. Elisabeth roused herself, and leaning forward, clasped her hands round her knees, uttering a profound sigh.

"Well," said Gordon, "this is Venice ! Are you satisfied ?"

"Oh, satisfied !" she said. The answer might be ambiguous, but there was nothing doubtful in the expression of her eyes as she turned them for a moment on her companion. She sat bending forward as before, her gaze fixed on the horizon. All at once her figure relaxed ; she dropped back into her seat.

"You are tired. I have brought you too far," said Gordon, with great concern.

"No, I couldn't be—I hardly ever am tired, I think," said Elisabeth, smiling a little. But her voice had an accent of despondency in it, and Gordon, leaning back, gave some direction to the gondolier as he stood resting idly on his pole. The man roused himself, and the boat began to move swiftly toward Venice. Gordon turned again to his companion.

"You are not cold, I hope," he said, with anxiety. "You have no extra wrap, I'm afraid."

"But I am not cold in the least," said Elisabeth, with some eagerness, "nor tired either ; how could I be ? I never enjoyed anything so much. I was enjoying it too

much. I was thinking that a good deal of our time here is gone already." She paused. "That was all," she concluded, turning to Gordon with a smile.

"Oh, you mustn't think of that," he answered, quickly. "We must contrive; we must arrange. If the place is really doing Robert good, he mustn't think of moving at present. I am sure that could be arranged."

"Perhaps—no, we needn't think about it yet," she said, with a quick return upon her emotion that Gordon had noticed in her before. But his words had brought her small comfort. A little sooner, a little later—what did it matter? Day by day the chain was shortening that would draw them back to England; that was the thought that had stabbed her a moment ago. When first she had heard she was to go to Venice, the wings of life had seemed to spread again for Elisabeth; again she had seemed to stand, as at seventeen, on the threshold of an open future, a boundless world; and now it was the old life that lay before her, with its sad limitations, its sorry details. Of course it was all right; the future had been hers to choose, and she had made her choice three years ago; but, gliding now in the immense freedom of two heavens, as it were—the heaven above, the heaven reflected in the watery plains below—her soul rose for a passionate moment in revolt against her lot. She had been too young—too young! Meanwhile she sat impassive at Gordon's side, gazing before her as she leaned back in her seat, and he had only the dimmest perception of her mood; he understood only that the prospect of leaving Venice had for the moment marred her joy in Venice. They were near the entrance of the Grand Canal now, and as they presently approached the Piazetta he addressed Elisabeth again.

"Would you like to land here, Mrs. Holland?" he said. "We can leave the gondola and walk home by the Piazza. You have not been there, perhaps, in the evening.

"Oh, I should like to go. Would it take us much longer?" said Elisabeth. His first words had broken through her unaccustomed mood; they had brought her back instantly to every-day cares and considerations. Still, it seemed harder than usual to return to their silent sitting-room, or Mr. Sparrow's conversation.

"It will make very little difference," Gordon answered. "I will tell the man to set us down at the Piazzetta, and then you will have a fair idea of how this part of Venice looks at night. As soon as there is a moon we will go out

again. After all, moonlight in Venice is not to be despised."

The boat drew up as he desired, and they made their way to the Piazza. The night was very warm, the wide pavement thronged with people; the brilliant scene was at its most brilliant moment. It would be little to say that Elisabeth thrilled with emotion; every fibre of her being quivered in response to the wonder, the strange splendor of these new impressions—the lights, the hum of voices, the festal air below, the domes of San Marco aud the solemn shaft of the Campanile rising against the night sky; and out yonder the still reaches of the lagoons trembling and faintly luminous beneath the stars. She declined Gordon's proposal, however, that they should secure a little table and ices in front of one of the gorgeous cafes. The suggestion wore an air of such dissipation by contrast with the austere simplicity of her ordinary life, that her anxious conscience assured her that her husband would disapprove. Nevertheless, when, after traversing the Piazza, Gordon proposed that they should walk through the Merceria, she agreed after a moment's hesitation.

"The Merceria—that is close by, is it not?" she said.

"Yes, close at hand—the street of shops, you know, that lies on the other side of that gateway. I should like you to see it at night; it is another aspect of Venice from this. You are not tired, I hope?"

"No, oh no!" she answered; "but I mustn't stay out too late. I'm afraid it is rather late already."

He made no answer to this; and a few minutes later they found themselves threading the narrow and picturesque thoroughfare that winds through that quarter of Venice. It was brighter, hotter, more crowded even than the Piazza: there was an incessant shuffling of feet and flutter of fans as the people in thick ranks moved slowly to and fro; every shop flamed with lights and the brilliant colors of the paper fans that hung festooned over half the fronts; above this vivid illumination the houses rose dark and lofty into the night; only a narrow strip of blue sky with a star or two shining here and there showed between them. Elisabeth lingered a little as she went, looking at one thing and another her companion pointed out. There was not much to see; it was the light, the color, the brilliancy, the animation of the life, that gave the narrow winding way its distinctive charm.

Presently they both fell silent again; they had reached

the end of the street, and found themselves in a darkness that by contrast seemed profound. Before them a little bridge crossed a narrow canal : one gondola lay black upon the black water ; its lamp shone, the single light that illuminated the scene. Elisabeth stood leaning over the parapet of the bridge, gazing down on the darkness below ; her excitement had suddenly died out.

"Some other night," she said at last, turning her face to Gordon with a smile that he saw dimly through the darkness, "when I am at Thornton Briars, perhaps, I shall think of this night, and wonder how it can ever have been.'

She smiled, but her voice took an involuntary accent of sadness as she spoke. Gordon moved a step or two, then came back to her side. He also was excited. The evening had held no novelty for him in the sense that it had for Elisabeth ; he knew his Venice by heart ; but Venice has always some subtle surprise for those who love her ; and he had been seeing it, moreover, through Elisabeth's eyes. The next moment he had spoken words he would have given a good deal to recall.

"I wish," he said, "that you were never going back to Thornton Briars ; I hate to think of it ; I hate to think of the dreariness of your life in that dreary house. Forgive me if I seem impertinent, but of course I see—I can't help seeing—that you're unhappy, that your life is not a happy one." He hurried on. "I can't tell you how I feel about it," he said ; "as Robert's nearest relation, I can't help knowing and understanding—if one could do anything for you——"

His last words came falteringly to a dead stop, under the influence of what he felt to be the increasing immobility of Elisabeth's attitude. She answered him at last without turning her head.

"I don't think I have given you any reason to say such things to me," she said, gently ; "I would much rather you did not say them."

She moved away so quickly that he lost sight of her for a moment in the darkness. He immediately rejoined her, however, but she did not slacken her hurrying step ; she explained it in a minute by saying that she was afraid it was very late ; and they made their way onwards with such quickness as the slow moving and lingering crowd would permit. The distance was not great, but Gordon had never in his life found a walk more interminable. He said to himself that he had blundered preposterously ; he

could not, indeed, believe that he said anything that should necessarily offend Elisabeth, but if she were offended, that only went to prove that he had blundered. He said nothing more, however, until they reached the door of the old palazzo opening on to the narrow side alley.

"You must allow me to see you up this dark staircase, Mrs. Holland," he said then—she had paused a moment. "It is almost as public and much darker than the street."

She made no objection, and they ascended the wide flights of stairs to the second landing, where a lamp was burning outside the door. Elisabeth rang the bell, and turning, held out her hand to Gordon.

"Good-night," she said, without looking at him. "Thank you for all the enjoyment I have had this evening."

"All that is nothing," he said, "if I have ended by succeeding in vexing you."

She stood looking before her for a minute as if she did not know how to answer him. Then, as the door-handle was heard to turn within, she looked up; and as she raised her eyes he saw that they were wet with tears.

"If you vexed me," she said, gently as before, "I am sure that you did not mean to do so."

She vanished from his sight as old Maddalena appeared behind the opening door with a swinging lamp in her hand. Elisabeth passed her by quickly, and made her way into the sitting-room. It was not really very late; it was only the invalid habits of the household that made it appear so; but the sitting-room was vacant and unlighted. Elisabeth felt a pang of compunction at the sight of the empty room. In all their married life it had never before happened that she had been out just at that hour; and taking off her hat and gloves, she went in quickly to the bedroom, entering softly, in case her husband should be asleep. He was asleep, but not yet in bed. He was seated in his dressing-gown, leaning back in a roomy arm chair; an open prayer-book lay on the table before him: he had dropped off to sleep whilst reading. Elisabeth, moving with noiseless footsteps to his side, stood motionless for awhile, gazing down on his pale and tired face with an immense and pitying tenderness. Her momentary revolt was over; she loved her husband—oh, she did love him! If there were differences between them, it was greatly her fault. He was ill and worn and feeble; she tried him, no doubt, with her exacting temper, her childish desire for amusement.

There should be an end of all that. She dropped on her knees at his side. What did the whole world matter if she could but learn to please him? Her cheeks flamed for a moment as she recalled Gordon's words. If she had cause for sadness, it concerned herself alone; herself and the life she shared with her husband.

Just then Mr. Holland awoke, and half roused to the consciousness that he had fallen asleep in his chair and that she was beside him, found himself in a mood of kindliness.

"You here, my dear?" he said. "What time is it?"

"I don't know; I'll see," said Elisabeth; but she made no movement to rise. With a sudden impulse she put her arms about her husband, hiding her face on his shoulder, trembling with an emotion she could not at once control. Mr. Holland, fully roused now, regarded her with astonishment.

"My dear!" he said once or twice—"my dear!"

Elisabeth could not answer. She very rarely lost complete self-control; she was too reticent by nature, she was too much withheld by diffidence. But a note of passion out of the past had touched her now, and she could not immediately silence it. No; the differences between herself and her husband were not irreparable. She would tell him—she could have told him now—of all her consciousness of past failure; she would compel a new beginning to their common life. Was he not, after all, the spiritual guide that she had chosen? He put up his hand at last to disengage hers.

"Elisabeth, my dear," he said, "I am very tired."

Elisabeth's hands dropped to her side instantly. Her passion passed like a flame blown upon.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she said, starting up. "It is my fault; I oughtn't to have stayed out so late."

"Not entirely," he answered. "Sparrow stayed later than I could have wished. He began talking after supper, and the time passed without his noticing the hour. Still, another evening, I should wish you to return earlier. Sparrow stayed on, I think, expecting to see you return. I should prefer, indeed, your not going out in the evening at all."

"I will not," said Elisabeth, divided between humility and resentment at being made the subject of Mr. Sparrow's remarks. "Would you like me to read to you?" she asked, "or shall I come again presently?"

"Neither, my dear, thank you. I have had enough reading, I believe, for this evening." He closed his prayer-book as he spoke; he was fully awakened now, and went on with increased gravity. "I was surprised, I own," he said, "not to see you appear at the supper-table. Certainly, I should prefer your not going out again in the evening with Gordon. Sparrow thought your absence strange, I feel sure; and I fail to understand what Gordon was thinking of in keeping you out to such an extraordinary hour."

"It was my fault," said Elisabeth. "Mr. Temple would, of course, have brought me back at any hour I wished. I ought to have asked him to bring me straight home; instead of that, we went to the Piazza and the Merceria."

Mr. Holland was unmoved by her candor, which, indeed, had cost her little effort. She had felt impelled to defend Gordon.

"My dear," he said, "don't let it occur again—indeed, I must beg that it does not occur again. And now, if you will leave me, I believe I may be able to get to sleep without any reading to-night. Certainly, I sleep much better in Venice."

Elisabeth left him as desired, but it was late that night before she herself slept. This was one of those times when the problems of life seemed to her many and perplexing. Nevertheless, her last reflections that night were of a primitive simplicity; they embodied themselves in a resolution to be a better wife henceforward than she had ever been before.

As for Gordon, he forgot as he walked home that night to say to himself, as he had often said in these last weeks, that when he fell in love it should be in the easiest and least complicated manner possible. He simply assured himself that he did not, after all, regret what he had said to Elisabeth; he remembered only that when she raised her eyes to his they were wet with tears.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRIVIAL HISTORY OF FORTY FRANCS.

Youth has an extraordinary faith in good resolutions, which it formulates with the greatest ease, by simply omitting all the considerations that go to complicate the social problems of life. Elisabeth's good resolutions, being framed with an exclusive reference to her own conduct, had a sad habit of collapsing when brought into contact with her husband, whose good resolutions, if, as it may be charitably surmised, he made any, must have been framed on the same principle, though nearly twenty extra years of experience might, one would think, have taught him better. But to the irritable and changing moods of a sick man, experience has little to say; a sad fatality rules them; already that choice of ways insisted upon by the theologian is to a great extent closed; for better, for worse, the path worn by a lifetime has to be followed. Thus it happened that the very next day a wider breach threatened between Elisabeth and her husband than had yet opened between them. It was no very tragic event that brought this about; our heroine's history so far moves, as we have seen, on no very heroic lines; it was merely a small and dismal question concerning forty francs.

It was on this day that the meeting in connection with the new Schlossberg church, of which mention has been made, was to be held at the Pension Werner. It had been postponed for some days, on account of the indisposition of the young lady whose recitations were to form its principal attraction; but it had been finally fixed in the end of the week following that originally decided on. Elisabeth, having pledged herself to go, saw no immediate way of escape. She wished—she wished with all her heart she did, for two uncomfortable giants stood confronting her: she would have to remind her husband that she was going; and she would have to ask him for some money. Elisabeth rarely had any money of her own. Long ago, Mr. Holland had directed that all household bills should be sent in to him; and not long after their marriage he had suggested a similar arrangement to Elisabeth in regard to her dress allowance. "You can get whatever you want, my dear," he had said, "and I will settle the bills. In that

way we shall have only one purse, which will be better." To have only one purse had seemed an ideal arrangement to Elisabeth in those early days. Since then it had seemed to her less ideal ; for one purse, she had discovered, meant no purse at all so far as she was concerned, but an endless discussion over every bill. More than once she had begged her husband to make her a fixed allowance, however small ; but Mr. Holland had preferred to keep the expenditure entirely under his own control. "You have only to ask for money, my dear, when you are in need of it," he had said ; and Elisabeth went about with empty pockets. To-day, however, the matter was to some extent, simplified to her by Mr. Holland himself. "I am aware of the fact," he had answered, when Elisabeth had found courage to remind him that the obnoxious meeting was to take place that day ; and when, soon after dinner, she returned to the sitting-room after putting on her hat, she found him standing before a desk, engaged in examining a bill.

"As you will pass the chemist's shop on your way, my dear," he said, "I should be obliged by your settling this account. I desired them to send it in before it ran any further and I am glad to have done so ; the price of drugs here strikes me as enormous ; you must speak about it. The bill ought to be reduced considerably ; one or two items I have marked as erroneous ; you will see that they are corrected, in any case. The bill, as it stands, is thirty-one francs ninety centimes ; as corrected, it comes to twenty-nine francs fifty-five centimes ; you will on no account pay more than that, and less if possible. I shall have to give you forty francs, I believe, so that you will, at any rate, have ten francs forty-five centimes change ; and you will oblige me, my dear, by buying some lemons with the odd centimes on your way home."

He gave her the bill, and taking a purse from the desk, extracted from it with slow deliberation two gold pieces of twenty francs each. "You have no change, my dear ?" he said. "That is unfortunate, for I have nothing, I find, smaller than these twenty-franc pieces ; the paper money, to which I strongly object, would, I believe, have answered my purpose here. You will, however, represent to the chemist that his bill being paid at once, and in gold, a considerable discount should be allowed. You quite understand ?"

"Yes, I quite understand," said Elisabeth ; "I think

that very likely that may make a difference ;" She took the bill, and put the gold pieces in her little leather purse. "I have no other money, Robert," she said after a minute's hesitation.

"Well?" he said, regarding her with a cold eye, and pausing in the act of locking up his desk.

"There will be," began Elisabeth—she summoned up her courage—"there will be a collection for the church after the meeting," she said, "I think—I am sure that I shall be expected to give something."

"I see no necessity," answered Mr. Holland, "I gave Sparrow to understand clearly that I approved neither of the meeting nor of its object. He understands perfectly that I choose to have nothing to do with it. The claims on my purse at home are sufficiently heavy. I cannot undertake to support charities abroad."

"I know," said Elisabeth ; "and if I had thought about it I would not have gone. But as I am going"—she reddened very much—"I don't see," she said, rather helplessly, "what I am to do. Mrs. Sparrow will think it so strange and so unkind of me. She says so much about my position as your wife, and of setting an example."

"Well, well," said Mr. Holland, relenting a little. "Perhaps you are right, my dear ; it might look singular. Not that I attach much importance to that ; but it is as well to avoid occasions of offence. I don't know, though, whether I have any small change." He felt in his pockets, and produced, after some search, a couple of francs. "If you like to give these, my dear, you can. I can't say I think they will be well employed."

"Thank you," said Elisabeth, rather wistfully. She dropped the francs into her purse along with the gold, wondering how she should manage to conceal from Mrs. Sparrow the small amount of her donation. She felt sure that that lady would have a keen eye, when the plate went round, to the donors and their respective gifts. She said no more, however, having learned with some completeness the lesson not to expend useless words, and slipping her purse into her pocket, went on her reluctant way.

She was a little late, and postponing the paying of the chemist until her return, she hurried on to the Pension Werner. On her way up-stairs (the pension occupying the second floor of the house) she was met by Frau Werner herself descending in bonnet and cloak. That excellent woman immediately stopped at the sight of Elisa-

beth, whom she had not before met since her arrival in Venice.

"Miss Elisabeth!" she cried; "but how grown! how *verschönert!* My dear Miss Elisabeth—excuse me, my dear young lady, for calling you by that name, but I have never been able to compel myself to think of you by any other—what a pleasure to see you again! And the good Baroness; you know all she has done for me? It is owing to her that I am here now, and prospering as never I have done before. Not that all is smooth; ah, no! Mine is a kind of life that is never without its trials; still, I have much to be thankful for. And so you are in Venice, my dear Miss Elisabeth! Why, it seems but yesterday that you left us. Ah! the years pass like a day at my age, but otherwise with you at yours, quite otherwise. I dare say it seems to you many yesterdays since you went away; and so, indeed, it must be—so grown, so *verschönert.*"

"Yes; it seems a great many," said Elisabeth. "I am so glad to have met you, dear Frau Werner. How are the children?"

"Ah, grown and *verschönert* too, if a mother may say so," said the good woman. "Yes; they are a real joy to me. The eldest—you remember her? She is now eleven years old, and plays on the piano like a little angel; soon, too, she will assist me with the housekeeping. But I must not, dear Miss Elisabeth keep you waiting here on the stairs. You go, perhaps, to attend this meeting got up by Mrs. Sparrow?"

"Yes," said Elisabeth; "it is in the salon, Frau Werner, is it not?"

"Yes, yes!" said Frau Werner with a profound sigh; "it is in the salon; and that is why I am going out. Mrs. Sparrow would have it there—Mrs. Cleaver would have it not. I leave it, at last, to these two ladies to arrange it their own way. I had, unfortunately—I speak frankly to you, dear young lady; and after all, when a woman has to earn her own living, she has to consider everything, all round—unfortunately, then, I say, I acceded, before Mrs. Cleaver came, to Mrs. Sparrow's request. Of the two I should prefer to favor Mrs. Cleaver. Why not? These ladies, both of them, strike me as having little that is amiable or agreeable in their disposition; but it is Mrs. Cleaver who pays. It is natural, then, that I should prefer to do what she wishes. Mrs. Sparrow cannot be brought to see this; and hence scenes, quarrels, words.

At last I run away ; I refuse to compromise myself further. Adieu, dear young lady ! Ah, if all were like what you were—so easily pleased, so happy——. Forgive me for the words ; but we used to smile sometimes, to see how happy you looked in those last months. Ah, that was a beautiful time ; to be so at once beloved and betrothed—that comes like that but once in a life."

Frau Werner pursued her way in the happy consciousness of the best-chosen sentiments and phrases, whilst Elisabeth, mounting the stairs to the second floor, was presently ushered through the dining-room into the sitting-room, which wore an air of such chastened festivity as befitted the occasion. The tables had been removed or cleared out of the way, the closed blinds shut out sunlight and sky, and twenty or thirty seriously-disposed ladies, gathered together with some difficulty from the frivolities of the outer world, were giving their attention to a young woman who, occupying the centre of the floor, was devoting herself, with frequent gestures and many acute variations of the voice, to the recital and interpretation of a piece of poetry. Elisabeth, dismayed at finding herself so late, sank into the seat nearest the curtain that divided the two rooms (the curtain was drawn back to-day), not caring to look up or challenge attention, until a subdued clapping of hands, a discreet murmur, informed her that the immediate recitation was ended. Then, raising her eyes, she had an odd, momentary sensation of being at Schlossberg. Some faint hint, perhaps, of Frau Werner's personality in the draping of the curtains and the choice of ornaments may have contributed to this ; but chiefly, no doubt, the character of the meeting and the presence of Mrs. Sparrow and her daughter. Mrs. Sparrow was arrayed splendidly in the well-remembered brown silk—it had been turned and remodelled more than once since those days—and the no less well-remembered *parure en suite* of Honiton lace and topazes ; and Mary at her side, in a tight-fitting light-blue gown, looked, as her father had said, a little stouter, also a little more impassive, but not a day older than three years ago. Elizabeth had not seen her before ; and with the awful space of the room between them—Mrs. Sparrow, seated in state on a sofa at the farther end, threw an austerity into her glance as it sought Elisabeth that assured my heroine she was in disgrace—with that alarming space, I say, Elisabeth could not follow the impulse that would have taken her at once to her old

companion's side to say how much she cared to see her again. She had not greatly cared for her in the old days, but it was different now. Mary had, for her, the charm of the irrecoverable past, and she had the charm of contrast. No one could be more unlike Dulcie! The dull honest spark in her gray-blue eye seemed the friendliest gleam to Elisabeth; it kindled an immediate train of thought and memory; and absorbed in this—she was glad to be absorbed out of all consciousness of the young lady's recitals; they made her wish to sink through the floor—she might have remained almost insensible to her immediate surroundings until the close of the meeting, but for a slight though exciting disturbance that occurred halfway through. Mr. Sparrow had not appeared at the commencement. The first part was his wife's concern, he had said; his wife was acquainted with a young lady who had a gift for recitation; people, he understood, were always ready to listen to such things; and as they liked to have some return for their money, they might as well have that. He had left the arrangements to his wife, however, intimating that he himself should merely come in at the end and say a few words. When, therefore, amid a faint murmur of the discreet applause, the young lady had retired to a seat, Mr. Sparrow appeared through a side-door; and taking up his station behind a small table, addressed himself to his speech. He had hardly uttered the first words, however, when there occurred that slight disturbance of which I have spoken, and which effectually aroused Elisabeth's attention.

The disturbance, it may at once be stated, was a perfectly legitimate one, being no other than the entrance of Mrs. Cleaver, who, as she had frequently stated, had as much right to occupy the salon, with a view to her own uses, as any other member of the pension. Neither was her entrance in itself obtrusive; but her appearance with a large work-bag on her arm, a newspaper and two or three books in her hand, her Skye terrier Pinch at her heels, indicated so complete a detachment from the object of the meeting as to divert the general attention to herself. Every head was turned as she stood for a moment in the doorway surveying the company through a double eyeglass. Mr. Sparrow himself faltered and came to a dead stop. Pinch, who (it may be remembered) was a most friendly dog, profited by the pause. He understood nothing of what was going on; but so many people sitting

round the room meant cakes in the background, he felt sure ; and immediately squatting, he put up his front-paws to beg, emitting a series of short sharp barks that called forth an irrepressible giggle from some more giddy member of the meeting. Mrs. Cleaver, who had the courage of her opinions, and a great deal of dignity for a small woman who quarrelled a good deal with her neighbors, continued to survey the scene in silence for a moment, then crossed the room and rang the bell with decision. It ever after remained a cause of acute remorse to Mr. Sparrow that he completely lost his presence of mind and stood waiting in silent suspense, like everyone else, to see what the unspeakable Mrs. Cleaver would do next. It was Mrs. Sparrow's alert wit that put an end to a scene that might have its humorous side, but that practically was extremely disconcerting. She rose in her seat, and addressed her daughter.

"Mary, dear," she said, "we will sing a hymn. Go to the piano and play 'From Greenland's icy mountains.'"

The docile Mary, striking her vigorous chords, relieved the tension of the moment, and the united voices of the company drowned the orders presently given by Mrs. Cleaver to the girl who answered the bell. What they were could only be inferred by the return of the robust German maiden dragging one of the tables banished by Mrs. Sparrow's orders from the salon, which she proceeded to place according to Mrs. Cleaver's directions. That lady, having arranged on it her books, her work-bag, and her newspaper, withdrew with the same calmness with which she had entered, followed by the intelligent Pinch, who had left off begging when the singing began, and with a piteous howl, hidden himself under the nearest chair.

To whomsoever this unseemly episode might have afforded entertainment, it was certainly not to Elisabeth. She was horrified, she was scandalized by the scene ; she could not imagine how people could behave after so rude a fashion. She wished she had never come to the meeting ; she would have liked to slip away at once ; but after offending Mrs. Sparrow by arriving late, she did not venture to leave before the conclusion of the proceedings. Mrs. Cleaver meanwhile having disappeared, Mr. Sparrow recovered his composure, and addressed the audience with his few words ; and the matter might presently have passed from Elisabeth's mind, but for the fresh reminiscences evoked by Mrs. Cleaver. She remembered her now ; cer-

tainly, she thought, she remembered her, and how rude she and Mrs. Sparrow used to be to each other. At seventeen the proceedings of one's elders are not of imperative interest except as they affect one's self, and Elisabeth, with her books and her new life—that luminous dawn of a new life—had given the slightest possible heed to the amenities passing between Mrs. Cleaver and Mrs. Sparrow. Still, she did vaguely recall them now; the more so that, as she all at once remembered—her remembrances might have travelled further but for that—it was Mrs. Cleaver's departure that had left vacant a room for Mr. Holland at the Pension Werner. Elisabeth's thoughts passed from Mrs. Cleaver to Mr. Holland's arrival in Schlossberg, to the days that followed, to all that had fallen since. The room vanished, and Venice and the years between; she was a little schoolgirl again, tripping to and from her classes, blotting sheets of paper with long historical essays through the long winter evenings by the light of her lamp and by her crackling stove, visited by high visions, and with an immense, an immeasurable honor and bliss drawing nearer and nearer every day. She ceased to hear Mr. Sparrow's grating voice (but the harsh, familiar tones filled in her dream and made it real); those long-past days awoke again; she could see no flaw in them now. One anguish they had held, but it had but opened the way to that final consummation of bliss—alas!

She was suddenly startled from her dream. Mr. Sparrow's address, of which she had not heard one single word, was come to an end, and someone was standing in front of her, dangling a velvet bag before her eyes. Elisabeth was overwhelmed with confusion; here was the much-dreaded collection going on, and it found her half blinded by tears and altogether unprepared. In the greatest hurry she pulled out her purse, and, turning away her face to hide those inopportune tears—but her little net veil did that—dropped her two coins into the friendly darkness of the bag. It was a bag, to her great relief. That miserable little contribution of hers would not betray its meagreness by lying open and exposed on a plate; and this trifling fact encouraged Elisabeth so much that in a minute she was quite composed and able to cross the room to speak to Mrs. Sparrow and Mary. Mrs. Sparrow only nodded, being engaged, bag in hand, in emphasizing some point to a lady in black with a round, simple, humorous face, whose daughter, equally round-faced, had covered

herself with confusion but now through her irrepressible giggle. Miss Sparrow, however, greeted her former friend with something that, for her, was not far removed from effusion.

"I hardly knew you when you came in, Elisabeth," she said; "you've grown taller. Papa says I've grown fatter, and I think I have. I tried on a dress this morning that I had three years ago, and it wouldn't meet. Mamma told papa that you had grown prettier than she ever thought you would, but that she very much feared you were not at all sufficiently sensible of the duties and responsibilities of a vicar's wife. She said it was a great pity such a position should be wasted on a young creature who seemed to care so little for it. You won't mind my telling you, Elisabeth? Don't you really care about it?"

"About my position?" said Elisabeth, smiling a little; "I dare say you would occupy it better than I do, Mary."

"Yes," said Miss Sparrow, placidly; "mamma always says I should make an excellent mistress of a parish, now she has trained me so carefully, especially if she were there to help me. I think I could do it by myself, though, now. Perhaps I shall some day; but it seems a long time to wait; I am very tired of the Pension Werner. Everyone is not so lucky as you, Elisabeth. I think you are the luckiest girl I ever heard of."

Elisabeth was silent for a minute. "My husband is ill, you know," she said; "he has been ill ever since we married, and we are a great deal from home. That has made it rather difficult for me to do much in the parish."

"Mamma says we can always do our duty, however difficult it may be, if we only give our mind to it," said Mary. "She says she will do her duty even by Mrs. Cleaver, who is the worst woman she ever knew. Don't you think her a very bad woman, Elisabeth? Mamma says she thinks she will go away if Mrs. Cleaver remains here, only she doesn't know where to go, so I suppose we shall stay; but I think her very disagreeable."

"Oh, she is worse!" cried Elisabeth; "I can't think how anyone can behave like that. I am so glad to have seen you, Mary, but I am afraid I must go now, as soon as I have spoken to your mother. It is getting late."

Mrs. Sparrow was still addressing the lady in black, and did not interrupt her discourse at Elisabeth's approach. "A little here, a little there—in our wandering life that has to be our motto. We do not expect much; we know

human nature and our fellow-creatures too well for that. But every little helps, and we feel it our duty, Mr. Sparrow and myself, to bring these higher objects of our existence continually before others, especially in so frivolous a place as this. Our little gathering this afternoon will have satisfied us from that point of view, however small its results otherwise. I do not expect much."

"Ah, dear Mrs. Sparrow, how right you are!" her companion replied. "Yes, that is my motto also; a little here a little there. There are so many calls upon one, you know, and each one seems to have an equal claim."

"Oh, for that," said Mrs. Sparrow, rather resenting this application of her motto, "I cannot altogether agree with you, dear Mrs. Grey. I think one cannot discriminate too carefully *which* call has the highest claim. To my mind none can be loftier than the erection, wherever it is practicable, of fitting places of worship, for our ministrations to our wandering flocks, too apt to wander, alas! when away from our own beloved land. But I need not enlarge upon what Mr. Sparrow has already said with so much eloquence and justice. I only trust his words may have produced some practical results through their effect on the minds of our little assembly."

Mrs. Sparrow, as she spoke, glancing round the room, and seeing that almost everyone was gone, ventured so far to forego her dignity as to take a peep into the bag she held in her hand. She looked up again, beaming.

"Better than I had thought," she said, complacently, "Gold, I see, someone has given. No more than is right, of course, considering the object of the meeting; still, it doesn't often happen. You would be surprised, my dear Mrs. Grey, to know how often it does not happen."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Grey, "that would not surprise me at all—not at all. I only wonder how anyone ever has gold to give. There are so many claims you know! But I am very pleased on your account, I am sure, and I wish your church every success. Some day I shall hope to hear Mr. Sparrow preach in it. Amy and I are always talking of going to Schlossberg, and now we shall have a real inducement. Come, Amy; we must go."

Mrs. Sparrow looked after her rather doubtfully. "It is strange," she said, turning to Elisabeth, "how little real earnestness is to be met with in the world. Even you, my dear Elisabeth——"

"I was late, I know," said Elisabeth, hurriedly fore-

stalling Mrs. Sparrow's lecture. "I am very sorry, dear Mrs. Sparrow, but I couldn't help it. And I must go now; I have an errand to do on my way home. But I will come soon to see you, and I'm glad you are satisfied with your collection."

"Satisfied I will not say, my dear; but it is better than I had expected. And at least we have gained a moral victory, my dear Elisabeth. Mrs. Cleaver, I *think*, will not venture on such behaviour again; indeed, she will hardly, I think, venture to remain in the house after what has occurred. Unfortunately, she has no sense of propriety or delicacy, and Frau Werner gives way to her in everything. If you must go, my dear, I will not detain you. You will tell your husband from me how successful our meeting has been in every way. It will please him to hear about it, I feel sure."

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT FIRST ENSUED.

Mr. Holland, as his wife was well aware, had spoken truly in saying he had no objection to being left alone. A taste for solitude, it may be held, tells all in favor of a man; it argues a good conscience, for instance, and an independent habit of mind; and it may be conceded at once that in Mr. Holland's case the hours in which he was thrown on his own resources were spent, as a rule, not unprofitably, from his own point of view. It would not be too much, perhaps, to say that his best hours, now that his active life was sadly closed, were those he passed in solitude. His marriage had had the irretrievable misfortune to give him a wife who tended to bring out his worst qualities. That such a misfortune must of necessity be irretrievable, one need not, speaking generally, assert as a principle. But it was almost irretrievable for a man like Mr. Holland, broken in health and of a nature too common in strain, too narrow in its ideal, to be more than vaguely and uneasily conscious of failings that lay outside his immediate conception of duty. That conception, as may have been gathered from this narrative, withdrew itself within sufficiently strait limits when his wife was in question; since a decent morality in his own conduct (of course), a careful supervision of hers, and such supply of

her material wants as was indispensable, seemed to him, in general, all that need be demanded of a man who had had the ill luck to find his wife less to his mind than he had hoped. Elisabeth counted for very little in the religious meditations that for the most part filled those lonely hours when Mr. Holland was at his best. The prospect of death, for though he did not consider himself dying—he had rallied so often from one and another attack of illness—he was aware that his state was a precarious one; the shortcomings of his more strictly spiritual life, the account he must render of the flock committed to his charge—these were the matters that occupied his conscience and his thoughts. But occasionally, rising higher still, he felt that he forgave Elisabeth; not only that, there were even moments when he felt she might have something to forgive. It was in approaching him after some such moment as this, when he allowed a natural kindliness of temper to have its way, that Elisabeth had now and again encountered those milder words and looks that through all these years had kept alive in her the hope of some dawn of happier days. But such moments were rare. In general, Elisabeth's appearance jarred upon the sense of peace that was to him the foretaste of his heaven. He disliked the fits of irritability into which he was occasionally hurried; as a Christian and a clergyman, he felt them to be unbecoming. But this uneasiness of conscience provoked by her presence naturally seemed to him more her fault than his. He rarely felt irritable with anyone else.

On the whole, therefore, indispensable as Elisabeth had become to him in a hundred unconsidered ways, her occasional absence was a relief. On this afternoon, however, of the meeting at the Pension Werner, he may have found it less so than usual; for one of the fits of restlessness that now and then attacked him kept him wandering for a time with his feeble, uncertain movements from one room to another. He was annoyed at the meeting, annoyed that his wife should have gone there, annoyed by the reflection—it was not of a kind that often troubled him—that his donation toward a brother clergyman's church had been rather shabby. Five francs, after all, might have looked better, if a plate were handed round; on the whole, he might have afforded five francs. On the other hand, there was the compensating thought that he was three francs less out of pocket; and presently he came round again to the point of repenting that he had given anything at all.

Two francs was always two francs; and then it was the principle of the thing! Mr. Holland by this time found himself in a frame of mind in which the unnecessary expenditure of a halfpenny would have been a serious grievance. To calm himself, he took out his account books and began adding up the week's accounts. Nothing, as he had long since verified by experience, was more soothing than the contemplation and adjustment of rows of figures. He took the book to his seat by the window, and began to institute a comparison, full of interest, between the cost of housekeeping in Venice and that at Thornton Briars. He was engaged in calculating the difference in the price of meat—Dulcie's presence with them in Venice rather complicated the problem—when his wife came in. He went to the end of the row of figures he had jotted down before speaking.

"My dear———" he began then, in a tone of remonstrance, laying down his pencil.

He broke off, arrested by the expression of Elisabeth's face. She looked pale and frightened, and hardly able to speak; he almost thought that she was trembling. Her husband looked at her in astonishment.

"What is the matter, Elisabeth?" he said. "Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing—I mean, nothing but what is my own fault," she said. She paused to take a long breath. "I am so sorry, I don't know how to tell you," she went on hurriedly; "but when I went to pay the chemist's bill just now I found that I had made a mistake. I put the forty francs into the bag at the collection, instead of the two francs you gave me. I have only the two francs left."

There was a silence. Elisabeth, who had had the liveliest prevision of this moment all the way home, felt it was quite as bad as she had expected. Her husband was angry, and she had a great dread of his anger. It was altogether distinct from his moods of irritability, of sarcasm or coldness. He very rarely showed anger, but when he did Elisabeth felt herself confronted by something dull, hard and inexorable that had its root deep in his being, from which there was no appeal. He said little at first, however, on this occasion; for a minute, indeed, he remained perfectly silent, regarding her steadily. "You are incorrigibly careless," he said at last, rising as though to leave her.

"I know," said Elisabeth with humility; "I mistook the money. I can't think how it happened."

"It matters nothing to me how it happened," he replied; "it concerns me only that the money should be recovered. If you can afford to throw away forty francs I cannot. You had better return at once to Mrs. Sparrow and ask for it back."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," said Elisabeth, flushing painfully. "Mrs. Sparrow has always been so kind to me, and she was so pleased this afternoon because there was more money than she expected. I will do anything rather than that."

Mr. Holland paused half-way to the door. "You will oblige me," he said, "by doing what I ask. If you commit an error, the least you can do is to repair it, and what I ask of you is perfectly reasonable. You had, in fact, no more right to pay away those forty francs than you would have to take the money out of my desk for your own purposes. The one is as dishonest as the other."

Elisabeth stood motionless, incapable of reply. The words, as from husband to wife, seemed to her so dishonoring that reply was impossible. Mr. Holland went on, with some slight relenting in his accent:

"Of course, I am aware," he said, "that in the present instance it was simple carelessness on your part. But there is a point at which carelessness may become inexcusable in its results, nor can I ascertain that you make any effort to improve. The first time I saw you, you had lost your purse——"

"Oh, don't!" cried Elisabeth. That episode, through, which she had suffered so cruelly, was one she could not bear to have revived; its contrast and its similarity with the present were alike poignant. Mr. Holland went on, unmoved:

"You had lost your purse," he said, "putting me to very considerable inconvenience to repair your negligence. I see no reason why I should suffer loss on this occasion. You will oblige me by at once writing or going to Mrs. Sparrow to explain matters."

He moved toward the door as he spoke, but Elisabeth detained him.

"I don't think," she said, trying to speak calmly, "that I could do that; it would be impossible for me to do it. If you had been at the meeting this afternoon you would understand how it is. And we can afford the forty francs," she went on pleadingly. "I know it is a great deal of money, but it has gone for a good purpose, and it isn't

so much for us to give——" She faltered and stopped before the expression of her husband's eye. "We can save the money," she went on. "You can take it out of my dress; I will do without anything new for as long as you like. I don't mind what you do, but indeed I couldn't ask Mrs. Sparrow to give it back to me."

He said not a word in reply. He simply disengaged his arm from the hand she had laid on it and left the room, closing the door behind him. Elisabeth sank down into a chair. He was angry, and his anger was dreadful to her, and the terms on which they lived. She did not see how life was to go on, on such terms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BARONESS'S WEDDING-GIFT.

She was roused from the sort of darkness into which she had fallen by the opening of the door. Old Maddalena came in and presented her with a card, inscribed with the name of Gordon Temple. The signore was waiting outside, the old woman said; and Elisabeth, passing her hand over her eyes to clear away some dimness and dizziness, saw a few words written in pencil. "Can I see you or Robert for one minute?" they ran. Elisabeth, bewildered at first by the formality, immediately after perceived in it a recognition of the rather strained terms on which they had parted the night before. She had been vexed, she remembered, by his words; yes, she had been more than vexed. . . . She had hardly known how she felt. But all that was like past history to her now. She was feeling so unhappy, so miserable, that had all the world combined to recognize the fact, it would have hardly seemed unnatural to her. In any case, Elisabeth's was not a disposition to cherish rancor, and she liked Gordon better than almost any one she knew. She desired Maddalena to ask Mr. Temple to come in.

He entered with less of animation in his manner than she had ever seen in him before, and shook hands with her in silence. "You wanted to see Robert or me?" she said.

"Yes; I have come for one minute only," he replied. "I have had bad news that obliges me to leave Venice im-

mediately, and I didn't want to go without telling you myself, and wishing you good-by. My father is very ill."

"Your father? Oh, I am sorry—I am sorry!" said Elisabeth.

"Yes, I knew you would be sorry. I had a letter from Emilia this morning telling me he was less well; and an hour ago I had a telegram bidding me come at once. I should in any case, I believe, have started this evening, but this, of course, decides me. I leave by the evening train."

He stood silent for a minute looking out of the window.

"It is a great trouble for you," said Elisabeth at last, gently.

"Yes, it is a great trouble." He turned to go, and taking her hand, shook it again and again; he seemed hardly to know what he did. "You will let Robert know," he said, moving toward the door. "I can't wait to see him now. I don't know when I may be in Venice again; but you will hear from us of course—from Emilia or from myself."

"Yes, we shall want to hear," said Elisabeth. "Give—give my love to your father. I hope you will find him better."

"Thank you, thank you." He paused a moment with his hand on the door. "I should like to know how Robert is—how you are getting on," he said with some hesitation.

"I will write," said Elisabeth, simply.

"Thank you; that will be very good of you." He seemed about to say something more, but changed his mind. The door closed behind him; he was gone.

Elisabeth sat down again in the chair where he had found her. Her husband's uncle, who was nothing to her husband, but who had been a good deal to her, was dying; she would never, she felt sure, see or hear from the kind old man again. It was a real, an appreciable loss in her life; and Elisabeth was too young, too unused to losses of this kind, not to feel it keenly. Death was always strange and terrible to her; no one wanted to die! Her first impulse was to go and tell her husband; but when her hand was on the lock of the door into his room, her courage failed her. He was probably still angry, and she could not face his anger just then. She turned and went round to a small room opening out of the bedroom she had been about to enter, but at an elevation of two or three steps above it, and with a second door communicating with the

large unused bedroom already mentioned, that enabled her to make her way round without disturbing her husband by passing through his apartment. It was a bright little room, sparely furnished in white and gold and faded blue silk, frescoed and stuccoed, and with one of its two windows looking out on the Grand Canal. Elisabeth, pleased by its air of gaiety, had appropriated it to her own use ; here were her writing-case and her work-basket ; here were such books as she had brought with her to Venice—Mr. Holland, who seldom read himself, had an insurmountable dislike to seeing his wife's books lying about—here she locked away a diary in which she still occasionally scribbled. She sat down now in one of the stiff white and gold armchairs, turning her back on the brightness that streamed in through the open window, and set herself hopelessly to think. For awhile she thought of Gordon and of his father ; her thoughts followed him on his sad journey, and dwelt on the greater sadness that probably awaited him at its end ; but presently her mind returned to her own troubles, and to the immediate misery of those wretched forty francs. What was she to do about them ? How procure the money that in the confusion of the moment—she understood quite well how it had been —she had so heedlessly given away ? It had been unpardonably heedless ; oh, she was ready to own it ! but that was not the point ; the point was how to get the money back. After all, why should she not go and explain the whole matter to Mrs. Sparrow ? It would be simple enough, surely—yes, and not unreasonable ; on the whole, perhaps, the most straightforward line of action ; only, when it came to the point, Elisabeth could not make up her mind to do it. It would have been easier had Mrs. Sparrow taken it less as a personal matter ; but as it was, Elisabeth, remembering the good woman's exultation over those luckless gold pieces, felt that she could no more ask for them than she could have asked for the return of some gift she had made, on the plea that she had wanted it for herself.

The sentiment might or might not be a just one ; but in either case it failed to further the matter in hand, how the money was to be procured. Elisabeth felt that her husband was terribly in earnest about it ; that he would never really forgive her until the forty francs were replaced. She had the conviction also that he wanted to punish her, and that her reluctance to apply to Mrs.

Sparrow had placed the means in his hands. Elisabeth did not pause to consider the estimate of her husband's character involved in these convictions; she simply accepted them for practical purposes. But what, after all, was she to do? Her memory, quickened by his reference to her long-since lost purse, reverted to Schlossberg and that other emergency—so like, so unlike—in which she had sold her necklace. But of that resource she could not now avail herself. In any case, she would have felt an extreme reluctance literally to repeat that dismal little episode; but the necklace was not in Venice. She had left it behind her, safely locked up in a drawer at Thornton Briars, together with the ring Emilia had given her, and other trinkets and valuables that had belonged to her mother, for which she had little use in her present life. No, she had no property with her of any kind of which she could dispose. Paltry as the sum was—it did not appear paltry, it may be observed, in Elisabeth's eyes; all her practical experience of money dated from the beginning of her married life, and she had accepted her husband's estimate of such things too literally not to regard forty francs as a serious matter; but paltry as the sum was, she saw no way of procuring it. For a moment she thought of applying to Mrs. Sparrow, not for the return of the money given for the church, but for a loan of the sum required; a moment later, however, she dismissed that idea also; she was too well acquainted with the poor woman's empty and dolorous purse. Forty francs! What did they not mean to Mrs. Sparrow? Two new gowns for Mary, or her own millinery for the year, or twenty other indispensible articles. Why, the sum was vast! No, she could not borrow it of Mrs. Sparrow.

A knock at the door interrupted her. The day had declined unheeded during these helpless meditations, and Maddalena was come to say that supper was ready. Elisabeth started up; she must meet her husband now; and thinking of their *tête-à-tête* meal, she wished for once that Dulcie were with them. She quietly opened the door of the room adjoining that she was in, and entered. The evening was drawing toward night and the room was almost dark. In the dusk Elisabeth saw her husband resting on the sofa, and went up to him with noiseless steps. He was not asleep; and as at her approach he turned his eyes on her, she perceived that the anger had not gone out of them.

"Supper is ready, Robert," she said.

He made no answer of any kind, only looked away. Elisabeth went on :

"Your cousin Gordon has been here," she said. "He came in for a minute only—he couldn't wait to see you ; but he begged me to tell you that he has had news that his father is very ill, and that he is starting for Schlossberg this evening."

Mr. Holland looked round again.

"My uncle is ill?" he said.

"Yes; very ill. I fear—I think Mr. Temple thinks—that he is dying."

"He is an old man," her husband answered. He half rose, and drew a knitted coverlet more closely over his feet. "You had better take your supper without me," he said ; "I am not feeling well this evening. I prefer to be alone."

"You are not feeling so well?" said Elisabeth, in instant alarm. "What will you have, Robert? You will have some supper, surely?"

"I think not," he replied. "If I require anything later on, I will let Maddalena know."

He turned from her more decidedly as he finished speaking. Elisabeth moved away with a dismayed sinking of the heart. Nothing ever tried her more in their married life than her husband's occasional fits of obstinacy in the treatment of himself. They reduced her to helplessness. Words were of no effect, as she had long since learned ; they only prolonged a mood that one cause or another had induced. She went away into the dining-room, a somewhat shadowy apartment, looking out, like the anteroom, upon the waters of the side-canal. It was quite dark in here, and Maddalena had lighted and set on the supper-table a frugal lamp, that dimly illuminated the gloom and Mr. Holland's empty chair, which stood facing his wife's as with a sad intention of reproach. Elisabeth had a healthy young appetite, and this rather sorry spectacle failed to take it away. But it worked upon her, nevertheless. She ate her supper with no knowledge of what she ate ; that vacant seat seemed to set her completely in the wrong, and yet, her husband being what he was, she did not see how she was to get right again ; from which it will be perceived that Mr. Holland and his wife had, at least, one problem in common.

All at once a ray of light fell upon this dark question of

the forty francs. Elisabeth's mind, straying hither and thither, had more than once turned toward the Baroness. If Madame von Leuwine were in Venice, the poor child thought, her difficulty would at once be solved; she would have no hesitation in going to that trusted friend; from her she could have borrowed the money without scruple. But the Baroness was in Vienna; two or three days must of necessity elapse before she could receive an answer to any appeal, and Elisabeth did not see how she was to go on living through more days such as this had been. Still, she had nearly made up her mind to write, when she all at once remembered that long ago wedding present of a sealed packet, that was to help her in an emergency, should such ever arise. Elisabeth had often thought of it since, of course; it had accompanied her wherever she went in the pocket of her little travelling writing-case; and as time went on, she had understood better than at first the Baroness's intention in giving it to her. Once or twice even she had thought of opening it; but the immediate difficulty that suggested the idea passed, and she kept it still as a sort of trust, only to be betrayed in a moment of extreme emergency. The moment, it seemed to her, had arrived; the emergency, indeed, was small, but it was extreme. Elisabeth measured its extremity by the immense relief she felt in the possibility of the matter being so readily settled. She sprang up from the supper-table—she had finished supper, and had been gazing drearily before her at the circle of light that illuminated the tablecloth and the remains of her repast—and taking the lamp in her hand, paused only to ascertain from Maddelena that her husband had ordered some supper to be taken to him in his room, and made her way back again to the bright little *salottino*. Her writing-case was there, in the table drawer; now that she had made up her mind to open the packet, she could not rest till she had done so.

She took out the sealed envelope and opened it, not without a certain emotion, but without any very ardent curiosity. Whatever money it might contain, twenty, ten, five pounds even, it would certainly be more than forty francs; and forty francs was the immediate business on hand. A slip of paper first met her eye, with a few lines on it in the Baroness's handwriting. "I send the enclosed money, my dear child," the words ran, "in the form of notes rather than in that of a check, both because you may find it convenient to have a larger or smaller sum to your hand,

and because, should you happen to be in a foreign town, there might be a certain difficulty and delay, especially after a lapse of time, in getting a check cashed. At any rate, should you read this, it will prove that my careless Elisabeth has at least so far kept an old friend's wedding-gift in safety; and the old friend can only desire that it may be as useful and profitable to her as she wishes it to be now as she writes these lines." Behind this slip of paper was a rather thick bundle of Bank of England notes; and Elisabeth, loosening and turning them over, recognized to her surprise, to her stupefaction, that they amounted in all to not less than a hundred pounds.

Her first, absolutely her first impulse on recovering from that moment of astonishment, was to gather up the notes and carry them to her husband. How pleased he would be; that was her first thought; her second, that the pleasure they would give might do away with all further difficulty about the forty francs. But half-way to the door she paused. Shut her eyes as she would, Elisabeth knew her husband by heart by this time; and she could foresee, with a prevision that had the force and clearness of actuality, how he would look, what he would say, when she took him the money. He would express no pleasure, not in the mood he was in now; he would question her with an austerity she had learned to dread. How had she come by the money? Why had she kept it hidden all this time? In what view had the Baroness made such a gift on such conditions? Her husband's latent animosity toward his family, and almost everyone connected with it, was a sentiment she always dreaded to excite, especially in regard to the Baroness; the Baroness had shown herself so true a friend. No, Elisabeth could not face it all at that moment; she would postpone it till to-morrow. She would take one of the five-pound notes (the money was in notes of varying value) as early as she could to some money-changer; and when she had given her husband the forty francs, and set that matter straight, she would tell him about the rest. After all, it was a hundred pounds. He could hardly fail to be content!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. CLEAVER REPEATS HERSELF.

It was not until the afternoon of the day following that Elisabeth could go in search of change for her note. Her husband was feeling less well in the morning; and though he made no demand on her services, she was unwilling to leave him until after their early dinner. He asked her no questions, but the air of grave displeasure that he maintained showed that he appreciated the fact that she had not as yet made any attempt to communicate with Mrs. Sparrow. Elisabeth had no idea of the acute annoyance he was really suffering in the loss of the forty francs. She was well aware that he was angry, an anger that had so far softened itself as to take the aspect of a measured severity; but she regarded the anger as chiefly didactic, not precisely assumed, but directed against herself as a culprit, and only indirectly connected with the loss of the money. She preferred so to regard it; it would have been, even now, almost incredible to her, it would certainly have been horribly painful to realize, that so small a loss rankled in her husband's mind to a degree to interfere with his sleep, and disturb the feeble conditions of his health. As a fact, however, it fretted Mr. Holland exceedingly; he could not get over it, as the saying is, and the fact that the money was gone for a purpose of which he had expressed a distinct disapproval made the matter worse. It was only by a great effort of self-command that he maintained the dignity of an attitude of silent displeasure toward his wife; mentally, his attitude was so far from dignified! For his anger had left him, like a convalescent patient after a fever, in a mood of extreme crossness. Had he betrayed this irritation, it is probable that Elisabeth, in an impulse to soothe and cheer him, would have at once related to him the history of Madame von Leuwine's gift; any betrayal of weakness on his part might have made that possible to her. But his austere silence, his austere displeasure, daunted her now as on the previous evening. She would wait, she again thought, until the immediate cause of that displeasure was removed.

She presently started on her errand, taking with her the five-pound note. There was a certain money-changer,

whose bureau she had noticed more than once in one of the narrow streets near San Moise ; and for so small a sum she would go there, she thought, rather than to the banker's where she had once been to change some circular notes for her husband ; it appeared to her less formidable. The matter, it need not be said, was simple enough ; Elisabeth received the change for her note in Italian money, and was on her way home, feeling more cheerful than she had done in many previous hours, when she suddenly realized that she had received all her change in notes. A dislike to the Italian paper-money was a sort of monomania with Mr. Holland ; he had imbibed somewhere the idea that it involved a serious risk of loss, and Elisabeth looking now at her collection of shabby scraps of paper, felt that it would never do to take these to her husband ; she would only vex him again. She ran back quickly to the money-changer's ; but the man preferring, after the fashion of his kind, to keep his gold, declared that he had none in the house. The notes were perfectly good, he assured her with a smile ; was she about to leave Italy ? No ? Then it made not the slightest difference ; he transacted all his business in paper-money. Elisabeth, baffled, left the shop, and slowly retraced her steps. She must displease her husband again, it seemed ; apparently there was no help for that ! And then it occurred to her that she might go to Mrs. Sparrow and ask her to return the gold in exchange for the notes ; there could certainly be no harm in her doing that, since the notes were in common use, it would appear. Elisabeth was very much of a child still in her perplexities, in her narrow vision of the small exigencies and difficulties of life ; and she felt something of a child's pleasure in the thought that she would be able to take back to her husband the very same coins he had given her.

She turned once more, hurrying her steps now till she reached the Pension Werner ; and running quickly up the stairs, rang the bell. Mrs. Sparrow was at home, she was told by the untidy damsel who opened the door ; and Elisabeth, conducted by the girl, passed into the dining-room, where the table was set and the cloth laid as usual for the next succeeding meal. The dining-room was empty, but the curtain dividing it from the adjoining salon was half-drawn back, and through the opening came the sound of voices—a voice raised in acid remonstrance, another following in lamentable reply. Elisabeth had no

mind to find herself introduced into the midst of a discussion ; she drew back, and taking a card from her card-case—it happened to be one of her husband's ; her case was nearly empty, she found—scribbled a line on the back, begging to see Mrs. Sparrow for one moment, and gave it to the maid. The girl vanished from the room to seek Mrs. Sparrow, it was to be presumed, in some other part of the house, and Elisabeth remained alone. The raised voices still went on ; she could hear every word that was said ; and though she could not from where she stood see the speakers, one of them, she felt immediately persuaded, was Mrs. Cleaver. It was, in fact, that lady who was speaking in tones of unimpassioned and concentrated acidity, like the flattest of small beer turned hopelessly sour.

"Of one thing, Frau Werner, you will at least have the goodness to inform me," she was saying to that woman of many troubles ; "do I, or do I not, in this house occupy the best room and pay the best prices for myself and my dog and my maid ?"

"Ah ! my best Frau Generalinn, who questions it, who disputes it ?" said poor Frau Werner ; "if my house contains a room better than yours, let me at least know it ; it is at your service."

"When I disapprove of my room you may be certain you will know it ; let us keep to the point, Frau Werner, if you please ! And the point is whether in paying nine francs a day for my pension—a sum I consider exorbitant—the use of this public salon is included or not. I ask, Frau Werner, is it included ?"

"Surely, surely," said Frau Werner, soothingly ; "it is understood, without further words, that the public salon is open to every member of the pension."

"Oh ! it is open, is it ? I am glad to be informed of it, Frau Werner ! Perhaps, then, I may be permitted to inquire further on what grounds certain individuals, whose conduct to you and to everyone else I should be sorry to characterize, are permitted to take possession of the room to the exclusion of other people, who at least pay their way honestly and are not dependent on your charity for their daily food ?"

"Ah, dear heaven !" said the poor woman, "but we talked all this over yesterday, dear madam—and the day before, and again the day before that. I was wrong, I admit it ; it shall not occur again. But it is done now ; that cannot be altered."

It was at this moment that the little maid despatched by Elisabeth returned, and, card still in hand, wandered into the salon, seeking vaguely, as it seemed, Mrs. Sparrow there or elsewhere. The girl, as she passed, pushed back the curtain, revealing what Elisabeth from where she stood had been unable to see before—Mr. Sparrow seated by the window, book in hand, and quite unmoved by the torrent of words that flowed by him. The torrent, indeed, flowed on, regardless of his presence; or perhaps indeed, not uninspired by it.

"Oh, it cannot be altered—it cannot be altered!" Mrs. Cleaver observed, in answer to Frau Werner's last remark; "but other things can be altered. My arrangements can be altered, Frau Werner; and I may as well tell you at once that, if those very objectionable people remain in your pension—Well, what is that?" (this to the girl, who, with Elisabeth's card in her hand, was standing open-mouthed, confronted by this discussion, before Mrs. Cleaver and Frau Werner). "Kindly give me that card, since it is for me apparently. The Reverend Robert Holland—Oh, indeed! that swindling parson has turned up again then, and will be coming here, no doubt. Parsons always hang together, I believe; and I am not at all surprised that he should come; but I am surprised, Frau Werner, that out of regard to your own reputation and your children you should not see fit to forbid your house to swindlers, and persons who are on familiar terms with swindlers. Take the card, if you please; it is not for me, thank goodness! You will not find me associating with such persons as those."

"Merciful heavens!" said the poor woman, exasperated; "of what and of whom are you speaking, best Frau Generalinn? No, this is too much; mine is at least an honest house, and has none but honest people in it. As for Mr. Holland, I don't know of what you are talking: he is a saint, poor gentleman, a perfect saint! He was in my house for months, and I am proud to think of it; he only left me to marry the dearest and most charming young lady, my dear Miss Elisabeth. You must certainly mean some other person, dear madam; and permit me, at least, to take this card to Mrs. Sparrow. It is for her, I see; but she is lying down, I believe, with a bad headache; I doubt if Mr. Holland will be able to see her. Mr. Sparrow, perhaps——" She glanced at the window; but Mr. Sparrow sat, immovably reading, and she turned again

to the maid: "Is the gentleman waiting, Maria?" she said.

"It's a lady," answered the girl; "she is waiting in the room there."

"A lady!" cried Frau Werner, realizing the situation. "It must be my dear Miss Elisabeth," she declared sinking her voice, "My dear Mrs. Holland, that is, as I ought to call her now, Mr. Holland's wife. She must have heard every word we have been saying; and to think what has been said!"

"If I mean some other person, it doesn't matter what we have said if she is fifty times his wife," Mrs. Cleaver replied, not lowering her voice in the least; "but for my part, I don't believe there are two Reverend Robert Hollands, and I have no doubt this is the man I mean. He might be in prison at this moment for embezzling money belonging to a charity in the parish of St. John Martyr, where I had the misfortune to reside when he was curate. The rector, a poor weak man, hushed up the matter; *I* should not have hushed it up, you may be sure, if I had not unluckily been leaving London at that very moment. Why, some of my money went into that man's pocket! The Reverend Robert Holland, indeed—very reverend, certainly! A common swindler, I say; I have known what to think of parsons ever since. And I maintain, and shall maintain to my dying day, that people who associate with such a man are as bad as the man himself; and I should like to know what Mr. Sparrow has to say to that."

"I have to say, ma'am," said Mr. Sparrow, shutting his book with a startling abruptness, "that the whole story is a lie, as venomous as the person who invented or who propagates it, and one upon which I shall not waste a word." He put his volume in his pocket, and passed into the outer room.

"How do you do, Mrs. Holland?" he said in a loud voice. "My wife has a headache to-day, and can't see you, I'm afraid. How's Holland? I'll come and see him soon, and meantime you can tell him from me that he's uncommonly lucky to be where he is, out of sight and hearing of insolent old women who spend their time in slandering their betters."

There was a certain kindly intention toward Elisabeth in this speech, rough as it was; but she could not at once respond. She was standing by the table in the dining-

room; she had heard every word that had been said. She was quite aware it was her husband who was being spoken of, and she felt as if she had heard nothing at all; she simply felt as if the sudden rapid beating of her pulses would suffocate her. And yet she had all at once remembered, with extreme clearness, having heard almost the same words spoken before, to be met by the same response; that gave her a strange feeling of having known all about it for years. Her immediate concern, however, was to betray no consciousness of any kind. She forced her mind back, at Mr. Sparrow's words, to the errand on which she was come, and the effort gave her manner more composure than she always had at command.

"I am sorry I cannot see Mrs. Sparrow," she said; "I wanted to ask her to do me a kindness. Yesterday I put two twenty-franc pieces into the collecting-bag, and I wanted to know whether I might have back the gold in exchange for these notes. My husband dislikes the Italian paper-money—that is what I ask. But it is of no real consequence, of course."

Elisabeth handed the notes to Mr. Sparrow as she spoke. Certainly, at that dizzy moment, the matter appeared to her of less than no consequence; but, having come about the business, the easiest course was to go through with it. The clergyman took the notes from her hand.

"It was you, was it," said he, "who put in that gold? Mrs. Sparrow was wondering who it could be; we didn't think of you. What's wrong with the notes? They're as good as anything else, here, you know. Still, if Holland has the notion, I see no objection to changing them. I'll send the money in to you."

He left the room. Elisabeth sat down by the table, and leaning her head on her hand, waited. She waited for some five or ten minutes. Silence had fallen in the adjoining apartment. She had seen Frau Werner pass in hasty flight while she was speaking to Mr. Sparrow; but Mrs. Cleaver, as she was conscious, was still there, though she could not see her. A blind passion suddenly rose in Elisabeth's heart; she would have liked to sweep Mrs. Cleaver from the room, from her path, from her consciousness, for ever. But she did not move; she sat still by the table, and wished Mr. Sparrow would return. The day was stifling, she thought. She looked through the window at the old red-brick façade opposite peeling in the intense sunlight, at a boat sliding silently by on the narrow canal,

She wished Mr. Sparrow would come back; she longed to escape into the open air.

Mr. Sparrow did not come back; but in a few minutes the maid reappeared with a small packet, and a card on which Mrs. Sparrow had written a few wavering lines in pencil.

"Thank you, my dear Elisabeth," they ran, "for your and your excellent husband's contribution. My headache makes me quite incapable to-day, but I hope to thank you in person before long. It is no more than I might have been justified in expecting; but, alas! expectations are so often thwarted. We will speak more of this when I see you."

Elisabeth put the card into her pocket, the money into her purse, and turned to leave the house; but as she crossed the entry she became conscious of an immense desire to *know*. A profound and terrible doubt was in her heart; she did not believe what she had heard—not for a moment—and as little could she fling off the words and proclaim them a lie, as Mr. Sparrow had done; the doubt was too terrible and profound. With her hand on the lock of the front-door, she turned and went back to the salon. A simple question and answer—a question that need reveal nothing—would decide the matter, it seemed to her; but when she stood within the doorway her heart failed. Mrs. Cleaver was still there, seated by a small table; and a horror of the woman, and a terror of the answer she might give, came over Elisabeth. She could not face it; she turned to go once more. . . . No, she could not go, not with this uncertainty to haunt her henceforward for ever; above and before all, she must know. She walked quickly up to Mrs. Cleaver.

"Excuse me——" she began. Her voice failed her; she gave a deep sigh, and steadied her voice. "Could you tell me," she said, "the name of the rector of whom you were speaking just now?"

Mrs. Cleaver was reading a newspaper; she laid it down, took off her glasses, and scanned Elisabeth from head to foot with an incredible impertinence.

"I have not, I believe, the pleasure of your acquaintance," she said, "and I am not aware that I mentioned any rector's name. His name was Brudenel, if that matters; but I was not speaking of him, I was speaking of his curate, Robert Holland, who ought to have been, but was not, put in prison for appropriating the funds of a public

charity. The whole affair was a scandal to the Church; but nothing that parsons do surprises me in these days. And now, as I have to go out, you will perhaps allow me to wish you good-afternoon."

She rose as she spoke, and Elisabeth left the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THROUGH A NIGHT.

Elisabeth walked home quickly from the Pension Werner; to move quickly, to stifle thought, seemed to her the first essential just then. But when she had reached the old palazzo, and had begun to mount the wide staircase, her courage gave way; a sick trembling seized her, she sat down on one of the steps to recover. It was the same feeling, intensified, that she had had years ago when Mr. Holland told her she was not honest; she felt as though a black line of infamy had been drawn across her life. It was not that in these few minutes she had thought the matter out, or passed a reasoned judgment on her husband; it was already enough that in her heart she felt no power to repel such words as a baseless calumny, that she could believe it not impossible they should be true. She sat still for a few minutes, her hands tightly clasped round her knees, till the trembling fit had subsided; the staircase was vast and empty; there was no one to disturb her. But she could not go on sitting there; her husband would be expecting her, and presently she rose and went slowly on her way up-stairs to the second floor.

She opened the sitting-room door. Mr. Holland was in his armchair by the window; and seeing him seated there looking as usual, Elisabeth felt a momentary recoil, a movement of repulsion; for that moment her husband's familiar form and features seemed the mere mask of an odious and ignoble deception; it was, perhaps, the worst moment she could ever know. She stifled the feeling instantly, however; indeed, it passed of itself; and her immediate effort now, as before, was directed to appearing as if nothing had happened. It could never occur to her to speak to Mr. Holland of what she had heard; nothing could have been so impossible to her. She took off her hat and gloves as she had the habit of doing when she

came in, and taking the two napoleons from her purse went up to her husband.

"Here are the forty francs, Robert," she said gently.

He turned his head—he had not looked round before—and held out his hand.

"You have been to Mrs. Sparrow, then?" he said.

"Yes, I have been," said Elisabeth. She turned away and went up to the tea-table to pour out the tea Maddalena had just brought in. This was the moment in which she had meant to tell her husband about the Baroness's money, and now she could not do it. She felt weak, almost trembling, as from some physical shock; the effort to give the necessary explanations was beyond her. She must tell him at some other time.

"Well, that was right, my dear," he said in a tone of more cordial approbation than he often used; "I am glad you should have attended to my wishes." He was pleased, as Elisabeth had thought beforehand he would be. She brought him a cup of tea, and stood silent for a moment at his side.

"No, it was not right," she said then with an effort; "not as you think, at least. I didn't do as you wished, and possibly you might not approve of what I have done. But I cannot explain now. I am very tired, and I have a headache. I think I must go and lie down for a little while. I will tell Maddalena to come to you presently, in case you should want anything."

She left the room without waiting for an answer. Her headache was no mere excuse. Fortunately for herself and for her husband, Elisabeth had excellent health; but she suffered occasionally from severe nervous headache, and her hurried walk in the hot sun and the emotions of the last hour had brought one on now. She went away into the vast unused bedroom at the back, where it was dark and cool and silent; she piled some pillows on the bed, where a gilt crown surmounted faded green hangings, and lying down, closed her eyes. She was glad that the increasing severity of the pain presently shut out thought; she was still more glad when Maddalena came, an hour or two later, to say supper was ready, that she was unable to raise her head from the pillow. To find herself alone with her husband was what she dreaded just then more than anything in the world.

Later on still, the pain subsided a little, and she fell into

a confused kind of sleep. She was roused—it would have aroused her from deeper slumbers—by the sound of Mr. Holland's slow and feeble step crossing the floor, and the sense that he was standing at her side.

"My dear, you are feeling better, I hope," he said. "It is past nine, and I am thinking of going to bed."

"Oh, do you want me to read to you?" said Elisabeth, half-starting up. Her husband, as she knew, had an invalid's dislike to any illness but his own; she never felt that he quite believed in her headaches.

"Not at all; on no account," he said, laying a detaining hand on her shoulder; "but I would suggest your going to bed also; you would surely be more comfortable than here, if your head is really so bad."

"Oh, thank you; I will go presently," said Elisabeth, sinking back on the pillows, too much confused by pain to argue the point. To be left quiet—that was all she demanded then. Mr. Holland stood beside her in silence for a minute, then left the room. She heard the door close, and presently passed into a profounder sleep. When she awoke again she had the sense that it was far on into the night. The room was dimly illuminated by a night-lamp—Maddalena, before going to bed, had come in with a cup of tea and some biscuits, and finding her mistress quiet, had left them on a table at her side, together with the lamp. Elisabeth raised herself from her pillow and looked at her watch. It was between one and two in the morning. The pain in her head was almost gone. She drank the tea brought by Maddalena; it roused her completely, and left her, as is often the case in the reaction from severe headache, with a sort of lightness and clearness of spirit. She felt no confusion; she knew at once how she came to be sleeping in that room—all that had happened, all that she had to think about. The moment for thought was come now; Elisabeth sat up on the bed, clasping her hands round her knees; and in the profound silence of the night, in the stillness of the dimly-lighted, closely-shuttered room, she gave herself up to thought.

Afterward, looking back on this time, Elisabeth wondered a little at herself that she should not, to begin with, have rejected the story she had heard as incredible; but she never did; she never really doubted after she heard Mr. Brudenel's name. The faith in her husband, to which she had so passionately clung, had been too profoundly undermined; it had fallen hopelessly at the first touch;

she believed, as we believe blindly, inevitably in death, though the loved one should have been living and speaking a minute before. No; the story was not incredible. . . . And yet Elisabeth might have withheld belief, she would certainly have withheld so prompt a belief but for that last day in London, and her interview with Mr. Brudenel, and all that had followed; the sort of shock—she remembered it so clearly—that her husband had seemed to feel on hearing his old rector's name; and his inexplicable change of plan, and his hurried departure from town. Elisabeth, sitting there in the silence and darkness of the night, thought it all out. She went from word to word, from look to look; and dark as night, heavy as lead, conviction slowly settled upon her and left her dismayed. She sat there trembling again with a sick and dull horror she could not overcome. Mrs. Cleaver's words came to her mind, each one stinging her with its own crude and dishonoring hardness. Crime and dishonor had seemed words of so remote a meaning until now, and now they were come close to her—they had entered into her very life. She dropped her head upon her knees; she crouched under the weight of that intolerable burthen.

Presently she started up, stung by some insufferable thought of the coming day; and slipping off the bed, she began to walk up and down the room. How was she to meet the coming day, and her husband, and their life in common? She walked up and down quickly and more quickly, till the wide spaces of the room and the dimly-lighted darkness seemed to close upon her and stifle her like prison walls. She thought of her husband sleeping there close by: a sudden impulse to see him seized her. She crossed the floor, and opening the door that communicated with his room, went in cautiously. The door opened behind his bed, and she entered with noiseless step, fearing nothing so much as to find him awake; but, as she immediately perceived, he was sleeping quietly. A night-lamp was burning in this room also, and by its light Elisabeth could see him lying with his head raised high, his pale and suffering face relieved against the white pillows, his thin, blue-veined hand spread out on an open prayer-book that lay beside him on the counterpane. Elisabeth stood gazing at him with an indescribable emotion; strange to see him lying there, to feel that she held his secret, to know him unconscious of her knowledge. And then with a swift reaction, a passionate compunction and tenderness,

she said to herself that there was no secret, that he was her husband whom she loved and honored, that all that she had heard was false, and it was monstrous of her to think otherwise. But the reaction did not last; she would have given the world that it should, but it did not. She stood gazing at him till all the familiar lines in his worn face seemed to take a new meaning, and reveal to her a dishonored past. She recoiled a step, and then came near to him again. No; she felt no repulsion now—not as she had done before; rather something of pity, a dawning tenderness and compassion. His pale face, as he lay there all unconscious of her presence and of her hard thoughts, was a reproach to her; she had once believed in him so entirely; and for the moment that shattered belief seemed to Elisabeth a worse injury to her husband than to herself.

He made some slight movement, and, terrified lest he should awake and see her there, she slipped noiselessly back into the adjoining room and began to walk up and down again. Thought succeeded thought; she could not rest. Now she turned on herself in passionate protest against her own credulity, and then again Mrs. Cleaver's words came one by one into her mind: she remembered how she had said that Robert Holland ought to be in prison. Oh! that was dreadful; only to have heard it was dreadful. Elisabeth flung herself on her knees by the bed, burying her face, hiding it from the light of the dim night-lamp. She shuddered away from the words as from a scorching flame; a sense of dishonor clung to her; she did not know how to bear it. Yet through it all the bitterness toward her husband had passed away; instead, there was a growing tenderness, a sympathy, a sense of fellowship strange to herself. There he lay in the adjoining room sleeping quietly, with his long-buried past forgotten, unconscious of those cruel words, while she suffered for him. . . . Elisabeth hid her face more closely in the counterpane, stretching out her arms and clasped hands across the bed. She remained so for a long while not thinking much, trembling a little, convulsively, from time to time, but growing calmer by degrees. A deep and intimate feeling had passed into her heart, relieving the terrible tension of the last hour. Strangely, as she knelt there, a consciousness grew upon her that she had never had before, of the immense weight of sin resting on the world; strangely she understood, as she could never have under-

stood till now, how men and women could fly from the world to fast and weep and pray, and so to expiate their own and their fellow-creatures' sin. That—she felt it for the moment—might be the way, or some such way, for her also ; that might be the ray of light upon the formless darkness that closed her round. Elisabeth ceased to tremble ; she remained quite still for a long time. In this darkest hour her life had known, something sacred had touched her heart and made life still possible to her ; she had found what was perhaps, to one of her temperament, the only escape from an intolerable despair.

She rose at last, pushing back her disordered hair from her face. Lines of light were piercing through the cracks of the heavy shutters that closed the windows ; the night was ended. She opened the door leading into her small sitting-room, and passed from the darkened chamber in which she had spent the night, into the light and glow of the new awakening day. It was awaking to the clang of early church bells, to the shrill shriek of the swift circling swallows as they darted hither and thither, to a golden light on the white dome of the Salute, where it rose opposite against the fresh and cloudless blue, and shone reflected line by line below in the still unruffled surface of the great canal. Elisabeth turned heartsick from the sight ; she wished they had never come to Venice ; she thought she never wished to look on Venice again. Better even the chill dulness of the gray house in England ; and then the old homeless feeling of her childhood came over her, when she would willingly have wept for home, and knew no home for which to weep. She looked again from the casement, and wondered at her own want of joy in what was beautiful. That, at least, had never failed her before ; it was tragic to her, it measured her great loss to herself, that it should do so now.

She sat down in one of the white and gold armchairs, and began to think what she could do. What could she do ? To do something—that was become her passionate desire ; that was the final result of those poignant hours of vigil. The past was not twelve or fourteen years back for her ; it was new and living ; and to do something in adjustment of its wrong seemed to Elisabeth, just then, all that was left to her in life. Anything rather than to sit still and acquiesce with folded hands ; and then it occurred to her quite simply that she might pay back the money. Elisabeth dropped her head upon her hands, and

paused on this idea; her head was still weak and aching; and though it seemed to herself her power of thought had never been more free and clear, she was, in fact, morbidly excited, prompt to move to any extreme. She paused on her idea, until it took complete possession of her mind. She remembered the Baroness's money, and felt as if Providence itself had sent it to help her in this strait; this, then, was the end that it was meant to serve! She would send it to Mr. Brudenel—that was what she thought—and if it were not enough, she would never cease from working and saving until the whole was paid. She could at least do that; and the thought was a sort of salvation to her. It created an immediate drama in which to go on living in this vast wreck of life; it was an aspiration to satisfy; it united her, in a sense, with her husband, in the moment when their lives seemed most hopelessly severed. It did not occur to her that the money might have been repaid; that was not a side of the question that could arrest her attention just then. She drew her writing-case toward her; she would write to Mr. Brudenel that very minute, she thought; that was the urgent matter in hand. Had Elisabeth been older, wiser, more experienced, even had she been more herself, she might not have done what she did; she would at least not have done it in that way. But she was not old, nor wise, nor experienced; and she was struggling for sheer breath in a strange and mortal coil of agony.

She opened her writing-case to engage at once in her task, but then she sat a long time looking vaguely before her, considering what she should say; she did not know how to put what she had to say. It would have been impossible for her to write a word that should seem to cast a reproach on her husband; and only the confidence with which Mr. Brudenel had inspired her on the one occasion that she had seen him, enabled her, perhaps, to write at all. The letter, when it was finished at last, consisted of a few words only, and these she wrote impulsively, hurrying them together until they were almost illegible; nor could she ever after clearly recall what they had been. She only knew they had been guarded, that to one in ignorance they would reveal nothing, to one instructed they would convey her meaning; then folding the letter quickly together, without reading it through, she made it into a packet with the bank notes, put the whole into a thick envelope, stamped and sealed it, and directed it for the post.

The whole world was awake by the time she had finished, and presently she went away into the dressing-room, to change her dress and make herself ready for the coming day. She felt strangely forlorn as she came back into the little salottino ; her mood of exaltation was fallen dead ; it seemed hours ago that the night had ended, and yet here was all the weight of the day before her still. She took up her letter, and went away into the kitchen to give it at once to Maddalena to post ; she could not bear to see it lying there. (Only some time afterward she remembered that the letter ought to have been registered ; and then she felt that she did not care. Better that it should take its chance, than be guided by any further touch from her hand.) Maddalena was stirring about, boiling the water, clattering her pots and pans. She was fond of Elisabeth, who gave little trouble, and said shy kind things to her in her broken Italian. She asked after her headache, and poured her out a large cup of coffee.

"You look to need it more this morning than the signore," she said.

Elisabeth took the coffee, and drank it. She often had her breakfast so, standing in the kitchen, while Maddalena prepared a tray for her to carry in to Mr. Holland. The day's routine was begun again. She had thought, a few hours back, that she did not quite know how she was to go on living ; but, as a fact, there is nothing so impossible as not to go on living so long as outward circumstances remain unaltered. The stage-scenery provided by life is a constant element, whose stability no human being is willing to disturb ; the last extremity, the last desolation, is reached when the order of things breaks away and the alien elements rush in. Elisabeth took the breakfast-tray presently, and went away with it to her husband's room. Outside the door she stood still for a few minutes, unable to make up her mind to enter. She dreaded seeing him ; she trembled at the thought, with a mingled shame and terror. That she should know his past, and he be ignorant of her knowledge, that was the thought that daunted her ; it was like a crime. If it had been possible to tell him everything —but that was not possible ; no, that was not possible. She went in at last, strangely, with a new perception of indifferent things, like a person entering an accustomed room after a long illness ; and going up to the bed, began to arrange his breakfast as usual. But she could not look at him or greet him ; she felt like a criminal in his pres-

ence. Something of all she had gone through in the night, of the forlorn dismay that filled her heart, must surely, she thought, be written in her face. But Mr. Holland was at no time very observant, and he had the habitual self-preoccupation of an invalid.

"I hope you feel better this morning, my dear," he said, with a languid indifference to any answer she might make; "you look better, I think. I wish, my dear, you would speak to Maddalena again about making so much toast in the morning. I don't eat it, and it is only wasted."

"I will tell her," said Elisabeth, in a low voice. She turned away, and began arranging one or two things about the room. In a minute her husband spoke again.

"You didn't pay that bill at the chemist's yesterday, Elisabeth?"

"No," said Elisabeth; "I brought the money back to you."

"Yes; and that was quite right, my dear; but it had better be paid at once, on account of those reductions I spoke of. If it is delayed too long, they will refuse to make them. Are you going out this morning? There is that letter for Richards to be posted, and you had better take the bill and pay it; you will find it with the money in that small drawer. And I would beg of you again, Elisabeth, to be more careful when you are entrusted with money; you are far too careless with such matters."

He spoke not unkindly, in his grave deliberate tones, but Elisabeth could not answer. She left the room quieter, but more heartsick than when she entered it; the last trace of exaltation that had sustained her had died away before the petty details that engaged her husband's mind. Later in the morning she went out, to pay the chemist's bill and post the letter to Mr. Richards. As this last passed into the box, she remembered that other letter gone irrevocably from her hands that morning. A keen pang of remorse and apprehension seized her; she felt all at once as though she had denounced her husband. What if it should ever come to his knowledge! Oh, he must never know—she must never let him know; she must surely have done wrong in writing it, or she would not fear his knowing it so much. And yet in a moment she was glad she had written it; for deep below every other motive lay the hope that Mr. Brudenel's answer might prove to be a refutation of the whole story. His answer was, in any case, a point of suspense in the future. Nothing need be held final until it came.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SOME EMPTY DAYS.

Elisabeth was dismayed by her trouble ; she did not know what to do with it. It is one thing in a moment of exaltation to feel strong to bear and suffer ; it is another to go on living through the ordinary hours from which grief has estranged us. That night Elisabeth wept long and passionately. She had not wept before, and it was not the miserable story she had heard that brought the tears now ; it was some passing kindly expression from her husband. She had been reading the evening Psalms to him, as she often did after he was in bed ; and here and there some chance expression in that great outcry of the human soul toward the Invisible had touched her own sick heart, and made her voice tremble. This and her pale face—perhaps, too, some familiar and sacred word touching him also—moved Mr. Holland to a moment of compunction. He was silent after she had finished reading, but when she rose to re-arrange his pillows before leaving him he held out his hand to her.

"My dear," he said, "you look a little tired to-night ; you must rest. I am not insensible to your attentions, Elisabeth, even if I don't always speak of them, and although you may think me over-particular occasionally, my dear."

"Oh !" cried Elisabeth, disengaging her hand. She covered her face with her hands, and escaped from the room. In the little salottino she flung herself down and broke into sobs, violent, rending, at first, subsiding presently into despairing weeping. Those few reluctant friendly words had come too late. Only the other day they might have filled her with happiness ; to-night they had come too late. Never again—she said it to herself—could she see her husband as she had once seen him ; not one thin illusion hung now between herself and him. It was not the dreary history fallen in those years before she had even known his name ; that might or might not be true—the inevitable reaction had come, and Elisabeth had declared passionately to herself it could not be true—not that, but the sordid tale of their married life, its deficiencies, its meannesses, its commonness, its vulgarities, re-

peated itself in fatal clearness to her mind; and with it arose a profound scorn for the man whose nature had so written itself upon her most intimate experience. Her belief in him was laid waste; she felt it like a slur cast on her own nature that such belief had ever been possible to her. Elisabeth sprang to her feet at the thought, stung by an intolerable pang. Life was an insult of fate; the scorn she felt impelled to cast on another recoiled on her own head.

But continued scorn toward the man who was her husband, and whom she had so greatly loved, was not possible to a nature like Elizabeth's. The religious sentiment that lay deep at the foundation of her life revolted against that, and her need of an ideal; she could not live without an ideal. As her sobs and tears subsided, her mind turned to the pity and tenderness that had moved her the previous night. Yes, she could be tender, she could be loyal to her husband—that still remained to her; yes, and the acceptance of his wrong-doing, and the will to expiate it by her own suffering. There was an element of falseness in this conclusion that must, of necessity, vitiate it ultimately; but it was the best Elisabeth could do with the matter then; it was, indeed, as has been said, the only escape from despair possible, perhaps, to one of her temperament. Two smaller troubles haunted her through the day. One of these was the dread of seeing and hearing more of Mrs. Cleaver—worse still, the possibility that Mrs. Cleaver's story might find hearers to give it credence. Of this fear, however, she was relieved the following morning, when, having occasion to go out on some errand, she met Frau Werner. The good woman stopped instantly with both hands extended.

"Ah, how pleasant this is!" she cried. "Now, always when I go out, I may have the hope of meeting my dear Miss Elisabeth. But that, after all, does not content me; not yet, dearest young lady, have I had the chance to talk with you as I should like. You must come to me in quiet some afternoon and take coffee with me in my little room. And I can promise you that you shall no more be annoyed by the presence of Mrs. Cleaver. She is gone."

"She is gone?" said Elisabeth.

"Yes, she is gone; and I may tell you in confidence, dear young lady, that whatever the loss to myself, I am glad of it—yes I am glad of it. There are things, after all, that cannot be listened to; there are scenes that cannot

be put up with, one way or another, that had to finish. No, the twelve francs a day for herself and her maid did not pay me for that, even though I may find it hard to let my rooms again now that the heat has begun to set in. She made me another scene, dear Miss Elisabeth, when she had packed her boxes—she packed them the same evening and left yesterday morning—and all on account of that poor family Sparrow. To be quite frank — with you, dear young lady, I may say these things—I do not greatly like Mr. Sparrow; he is a little—a little difficult sometimes, also perhaps his wife; no, they are not all that is most harmonious in a household, and a loss to me sometimes—I cannot deny that they are sometimes a loss. But still everything that is most excellent and respectable; and Mrs. Cleaver wanted me to turn them into the street—absolutely into the street. 'There are my trunks,' she said to me, 'packed and locked, and there is the family Sparrow; one or the other go to-morrow morning. Which shall it be?' Ah, then, indeed, my patience gave way; I think sometimes I have not enough patience for my position and for my duty; there are things I cannot bring myself to support. 'But go, go, go,' I said, 'and the sooner the better.' So I said, and she slammed the door in my face. This morning she went, and I suppose I shall never see her again. Well, I dare say it is better so; but my best room is empty, and eighty-four francs a week lost to me. Ah, dear lady, if I had but you and that good saint your husband with me again, that is what I should like."

The other trouble that had haunted Elisabeth was the fear that her husband would question her as to where she had procured the forty francs; she did not know what she should say if he did. But to her relief, not less to her surprise, neither then nor on the following days did he make any allusion to the subject. She could not suppose him to have forgotten it; it would be altogether unlike him to do so; and presently she felt grateful for what she imagined might be a wish to spare her embarrassment. She would have felt less grateful had she known the real cause of Mr. Holland's silence. Certainly he had not forgotten the matter, nor the words she had spoken in regard to it. He had felt some mystery hidden beneath these; and in turning them over in his mind, he could conceive only one explanation for them, and for the air of making a desperate confession she had unconsciously worn

in the effort to escape his approval. He recalled that long-past incident of the turquoise necklace; and supposed that, in her unwillingness to follow out his wishes and demand back the money from Mrs. Sparrow, Elisabeth might have parted with some trinket. If that were so, he wished neither to say nor to hear anything about it. She might expect him to buy the trinket back, as the necklace had been repurchased by his sister. Nothing could be further from his intention; in fact, the loss (if he surmised rightly) would be a just punishment inflicted on herself by his wife, and he had no desire to interfere with that. After all, he had the money, that was the essential; the rest did not concern him.

In this hidden drama of Elisabeth's life, a drama which, if she had but known it—but she did not; her grief had all the loneliness that makes the despair of the young—was being played out in a thousand forms more or less acute in the world around her, there came a brief lull. No one can go on living at extreme tension; if a blow does not kill, the sufferer survives for the uses of common life. The next few days passed quietly enough. Had the grave enclosed her, Elisabeth, indeed, could hardly have felt more forlorn, more indifferent to outward things, more strange to herself; but as regarded her husband, the habit of silence that had long since grown up between them, and the routine monotony of their invalid life, made the days pass more easily than might otherwise have been possible. Mr. Holland, too, was gentler in manner than was often the case. Though he would for no consideration have permitted his wife to know it, he was so really and increasingly dependent on her for comfort that their hours of estrangement were becoming painful to him. He demanded of her one thing only, as the proper attitude for a wife, that she should be obedient and not critical; and Elisabeth had no desire in these days to be critical. Criticism had done its work; she knew every word it had to say. She only wanted to be good to her husband; and looking at his pale and suffering face, it did not always seem so hard. But Elisabeth was young; and the strain of the secret she had surprised, and the trouble of it, were hard to bear. Sometimes she thought she could not bear it; that she must speak, cry aloud, put an end at any cost—the cost would be terrible, she knew—to the concealment that was horrible to her. Only, when it came to the point, she always found it impossible. Fin-

ally her mind fixed itself on Mr. Brudenel's answer to her letter.

On the fourth or fifth day, however, the sort of silence that had fallen upon their life was broken into. The post brought two letters ; one for Mr. Holland, one for Elisabeth. This last was from Gordon Temple :

"DEAR MRS. HOLLAND," he wrote.

"My father died last night, some four hours after my arrival. He knew me when I came in, but could not speak, and soon after he became unconscious. That was best, as it spared him any further suffering. You loved him, I know, and will understand what the loss means to me.

"On looking through his papers to-day, I find a memorandum directing that certain books shall be given to you. You must let me know what you would like done with them. It might be best, I suppose, to forward them straight to Thornton Briars. I expect to be in Venice again before long, but hardly venture to hope that I shall find you still there, as it may be three weeks or more before I can get away from Schlossberg. Emilia, on the other hand, you may probably see almost immediately. She wishes to see Robert ; and I myself have urged her to go, as the change will be good for her. She was much attached to my father—I can never forget her great kindness and goodness to him—and his death has broken her down a good deal.

"My kind remembrances to Robert. I trust the air of Venice still continues to agree with him.

"Always sincerely yours,

"GORDON TEMPLE."

Elisabeth read this letter, and a mingled sorrow and self-reproach overcame her. In these last days she had seemed able to think of nothing outside her own life and its troubles ; and meanwhile her old friend had been dying ; he was dead. The kind and good old man ! She took up the letter presently, and went to tell her husband, who had not yet left his room. He received her with an air of cheerfulness that disconcerted her.

"My dear," he said, "I have just had a letter from Dulcie ; she will be back to-morrow. You will see that her room is ready."

"Yes," said Elisabeth. In the profound trouble that had fallen upon her, it should make small difference, she

would have thought, who came or went, and yet her heart sank a little at the news. "I have had a letter from your cousin Gordon, Robert," she said, after a minute's pause, "His father is dead. He died the same night that Mr. Temple reached Schlossberg."

"Ah, well! he was an old man," said Mr. Holland; "upwards of eighty, I should think. It was only to be expected." He was silent for a minute. "Dulcie has enjoyed herself greatly, in spite of the heat," he went on, glancing down at the letter he held in his hand. "Her friends want her to go on with them to the Engadine, but she prefers, she says, to return to Venice. She is a young girl with an enviable capacity for making and retaining friendships."

If the words were intended as a challenge to his wife, they failed of their effect. Elisabeth had no heart to discuss Dulcie then. She sat looking drearily before her, turning Gordon Temple's letter over in her hand. Her husband fixed his eyes on it.

"That is Gordon's letter?" he said. "Allow me to see it, if you please."

She gave him the letter, not without fear of some expression of displeasure at the prospect of his sister's arrival. He read it without immediate comment, however, leaning back in his armchair when he had finished, still holding it spread out before him on his knee. In a moment he read it through again.

"What," he inquired, "are these books of which Gordon speaks?"

"I have no idea," said Elisabeth. "They had better, I suppose, be sent straight to Thornton Briars."

"It would be well first to ascertain what they are, and whether they are worth the carriage," Mr. Holland replied; "the expense of forwarding a case of books would probably be considerable; and unless I felt sure that Gordon were willing to undertake the whole thing, I should certainly not choose to have the outlay incurred, if the books are not worth it. This is the sort of legacy people are so fond of making; legacies that are of no value to anyone, and simply involve trouble and expense."

Elisabeth flushed painfully.

"The books would be of value to me," she said. "I should like to have them. And as for the trouble and expense, your cousin Gordon, I am sure———" She stopped short.

Mr. Holland looked at her, and looked away again.

"I will write to Gordon myself," he said then; "and you had better write to Emilia, my dear, and say that we thank her for her intention of coming to Venice on our account, but that, as we shall probably be leaving in a week, we are afraid we shall not have the pleasure of seeing much of her. It would be a pity that she should make the journey under a misconception."

"We leave Venice in a week?" said Elisabeth, looking up.

"Probably. Have you any objection to make, my dear?"

"No; oh no!" said Elisabeth; "it makes no difference to me, where I am; why should it? But the air of Venice agrees so well with you, I should have been glad if we could have stayed on until the weather becomes too hot."

"You would like to stay for another month, perhaps?" said Mr. Holland, glancing again at the letter that lay on his knee, and smoothing it out. He folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"I don't care for myself," said Elisabeth, puzzled by his tone, but without the glimmer of a perception of his thought. That her husband should feel even an incipient jealousy of Gordon Temple lay altogether outside her range of ideas. "No, I would as soon be at Thornton Briars as here; what does it matter?" She sat silently despondent for a moment, her head dropped upon her hands. "If you are really going to write to Mr. Temple about the books," she said, looking up again, "I should like to enclose a note to him."

"You wish to write to him? I see no necessity, my dear," said her husband; "I can say everything that is proper and civil for both of us. You can send any further message you please in your letter to Emilia."

Elisabeth was again silent for a minute. She could have imagined no reason why she should not write to Gordon Temple—was too intimately acquainted, indeed, with her husband's obstinate insistence on trifles when the humor took him to consider the point seriously one way or the other. But one effect of the events of the last few days—though one of which she was completely unconscious—had been to give her a larger courage in confronting him.

"I think I ought to write to your cousin," she said; "I was very fond of his father—I think you must know that,

Robert; he was always so good to me." Her voice trembled a little. "I cannot believe he is really dead—I need only write a few words," she ended, rather incoherently.

She took a pen and a sheet of note-paper, wrote a dozen lines through tears that she instantly brushed away, and folding the sheet in half, passed it across the table to her husband. "You will send it, will you not?" she said, and left the room.

Mr. Holland read the note, and presently, writing his own letter to his cousin, he enclosed it. There was no reason why he should not do so that he could have given Elisabeth; but he felt annoyed, chiefly, perhaps, that he vaguely perceived a change in his wife's tone toward himself. He would have found it hard to define; he felt too languid just then to make the attempt to define it; but he dwelt with a certain complacency on the thought that the following day would restore him a companion whose attitude never varied from that of unquestioning and attentive admiration.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DULCIE RETURNS.

If it had seemed beforehand to Elisabeth that an emotion so absorbing as that which had lately possessed her should swallow up all smaller troubles, that life outside that great and direct struggle should present by comparison few difficulties, she was undeceived on the day that Miss Fawcett made her reappearance at the Casa Holland.

Her heart had sunk a little on hearing of Dulcie's proposed return. That was only natural; she had no cheering associations with her name. And yet afterward she had thought that she was not sorry. The continual *tête-à-tête* with her husband, broken only once in these last days by a visit from Mr. Sparrow, was becoming a sort of nightmare to her. His health even preoccupied her less than usual, for she continued to think him much stronger. There was nothing to disturb the long hours of silence during which a dreary fatality impelled her to read over and over again, with increasing clearness of comprehension, the history of these last three years. The hours stretched themselves out into what seemed to her already an eternity of darkness, since the day of her visit to the

Pension Werner. The presence of a third person might at least help to relieve this heavy strain, though it could not take it away.

But when Dulcie, in fact, reappeared, fair, blooming, smiling, delighted with herself and her adventures while she was away, still more delighted to find herself, as she expressed it, at home again, Elisabeth became aware of a sentiment she had not entertained before. Dulcie had a not ill-founded confidence in her power to charm other people, but she was perfectly aware that she had no power to charm Elisabeth ; and she had retaliated with those impertinences with which one woman can so readily wound another. It was the easier for Dulcie that she had long had the happy conviction that Elisabeth was jealous of her, and the happy certainty that she might go a long way in making her uncomfortable without her husband discovering or resenting the fact. All this, of course was nothing new to Elisabeth ; she had endured it with a mingled impatience and anger and self-reproach. With Dulcie's return she might know beforehand with some certainty what to expect. What she had not known was the profound feeling, rising from depths unstirred before, that Dulcie's conduct had power to arouse. It was hardly to be called jealousy ; it was rather a passion of anger at the levity and selfishness that could entangle still further the difficult relations between herself and her husband—at the injustice and indifference with which he accepted Dulcie's conduct. What was he to Dulcie or she to him ? Elisabeth demanded with a bitterness of which a few days since she would have thought herself incapable. In the terrible clearness with which she had come to read the story of her married life, self-reproach had taken a paler hue. Not she, but Dulcie chiefly, was to blame, she told herself. She had suffered for her husband ; she had suffered for him through hours in which guilt and remorse had seemed to be her portion because they first were his. Those hours were consecrated in her eyes ; they bound her to him by the immense emotion the mere fact that she was his wife had roused within her. What had Dulcie to do with all that ? What right had she to come between ? Elisabeth said nothing, however, at first ; silence was always easiest to her ; and she listened almost without speaking through the long afternoon hours—Miss Fawcett had arrived in time for their early dinner—while the young girl, who had a charming flow of chatter when she chose,

related her adventures; and Mr. Holland, leaning back in his chair, listened with pleased attention, smiling, and smoothing down his mustache.

"But I am talking too much," Miss Dulcie declared at last. "Dear Mr. Holland, let me read the newspaper to you now; it will tire you less than my chatter."

"No, no, my dear; I like to hear you talk," said Mr. Holland; "it amuses me. Elisabeth and I are both rather silent, you know, and you talk very well. Never mind the newspaper just now. It pleases me to hear what you have been doing."

"It is so kind of you to say so; I kept a little diary whilst away," said Dulcie; "may I read it to you by and by? I think one of my chief pleasures was the thought of all I should tell you when I came back—that, and the thought that perhaps you missed me a little, as you were kind enough to tell me in your letter."

"I have missed you very much, my dear," said Mr. Holland. "We have been very dull without you."

"I am so glad!" said Dulcie. "I don't mean that, of course," she added; "but it is nice to think one has been missed. It makes one hope one has been of use. You must let me be of use again now that I am back. Mrs. Holland is looking pale; she must let me sit with you and read to you as I used to do, and then she will be able to go out; I know she likes to be out a great deal."

"Ah, well, it is your turn; it is you who must go out now," said Mr. Holland; "you have seen very little of Venice yet; and if we leave, as I propose, in about a week, you must make the most of your time."

Miss Fawcett was unable to repress a slight movement. An immediate return to Thornton Briars offered no attractions to her whatever; she began to wish she had gone on with her friends to the Engadine.

"You leave in a week?" she said.

"Well, I thought of doing so—I thought of it; I have hardly decided the point yet," said Mr. Holland. "You would like to remain longer, my dear? It is true you have not seen much of Venice."

"Oh, no!" said Dulcie, recovering herself; "I like best to do what ever you like, Mr. Holland; you know I do. Only the air of Venice seems to suit you so much better than that of Thornton Briars, that it seems a pity not to stay as long as possible."

"Ah, that is what my wife says, and there's something

in it, no doubt," Mr. Holland answered ; "certainly I believe I am better here—not so much stronger, perhaps, as better altogether ; and that is the first step, I suppose, toward gaining strength. Well, we must reconsider this question of going away, though there are reasons that urge me rather strongly in that direction."

"Oh, you mustn't stay on our account," said Dulcie ; "Mrs. Holland wouldn't like that either, I'm sure ; and indeed, no one," she went on, turning to Elisabeth, "would think the air of Venice suits you. I never saw you look so pale before. I'm sure you have been too much confined to the house since I went away. Has Mr. Temple not been again to take you out in his gondola ?"

Elisabeth did not immediately reply ; not that she objected to the question—she hardly heard it, indeed—but simply that she was wishing, with a sort of passionate despair, that she need never speak to, nor hear Dulcie speak again. Her husband answered for her.

"My cousin Gordon is at Schlossberg," he said, coldly. "He has just lost his father."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Dulcie, glancing from one to the other. "Then you have both of you——"

"You have both of you had someone to miss," was what had been in her mind to say, but she checked herself in some confusion ; that, at least, was a thing she could not risk saying. Nevertheless, she was delighted with her own shrewdness in making the observation. This young girl, who had practically left her village for the first time the other day, had an immense curiosity as to the histories and secrets of the great world that she was entering. Her secluded life notwithstanding, she had managed to procure and read a not inconsiderable number of French novels, together with other literature not primarily intended for her perusal, that she had culled here and there from various bookshelves. Not always understanding very well what it was about, the instincts with which every young girl, innocent or the reverse, may be supposed to be provided, instructed her sufficiently that a good deal of it was about what was bad ; and this young girl had the idea (not unreasonable under the circumstances) that what was bad was probably highly entertaining, or at the very least highly interesting. Her excuse may be that she was, in reality, so far, tolerably ignorant in her wish to play with fire, and might still have the grace to shrink from kindling any considerable flame. In the meantime she had, as has been intimated,

an immense curiosity, which, joined to a shrewd intelligence, had already carried her far in the weeks since she left home. She had long since divined that Elisabeth was jealous of her friendship with Mr. Holland; it had occurred to her within the past five minutes that Mr. Holland was jealous of his wife's friendship with Gordon Temple; and the situation entertained her. It flattered her discrimination; it pleased her to suppose herself holding the key to such a situation as she imagined to constitute a large part of the interest and occupation of the world. She was in the more need of such entertainment that, after the animation of the last ten days, spent in the company of people rich, lively, travelling as people travel who have the power to follow the caprice of the moment, the old palazzo had to her the effect of a dreary convent. She had had no idea of what she was coming back to, she said to herself—her point of view had changed so much in the last few days. She wondered at her own infatuation in choosing to return to Venice rather than to go on to the Engadine; she had behaved like a little schoolgirl, she thought, who should prefer to go on wearing a brown linsey frock when a fine court dress had been provided for her. The comparison was a juster one than Dulcie perhaps imagined. Her relations to Mr. Holland, especially since his marriage, had not been distinguished by sincerity, or the absence of egotism. Nevertheless, her affection for the friend she had known most of her life had been one of her most genuine sentiments; and when, before the afternoon was ended, she reflected with a yawn that the *rôle* of companion to an invalid clergyman was, after all, not a very engaging one—she wondered why she had ever thought it was—she was on the verge of divesting herself of one of the last rags of simplicity that clung to her.

By tea-time Dulcie had quite made up her mind that she would not return to Thornton Briars. It was not too late to write and propose rejoining her friends. They would be charmed to have her, she knew; she had made herself charming! In any case, she reflected, she must have returned to Casa Holland to fetch the trunks she had left there; and, after all, she had seen nothing yet of Venice. She cared very little about sight-seeing in itself; still, it was useful for conversational purposes, and there would be an obvious absurdity in having spent three weeks or more there, and seen none of the things well-instructed

people went to see. She had found the disadvantages of that already in these last days ; when she asserted that the care of an invalid friend had kept her back from visiting Tintorettos and Carpaccios, she had been pitied, but not admired in the least. Evidently, to see pictures was the more admirable, and also the more profitable, occupation ; and Dulcie had come back determined to do her duty in that respect. She would make the most, then, of this week that remained—if she had anything more to say in the matter, she would beg Mr. Holland not to remain longer —and at the end of the week she would go on to the Engadine.

It is not, I believe, a new observation, that the force expended by the human mind for trivial ends might, if otherwise directed, achieve great enterprises ; and to the impartial historian the contortions of an ant discontented with its lodging in the ant's nest should be a no less interesting subject of contemplation than the mythic flight of the eagle toward the sun. Dulcie was not at her great enterprises yet, though in later years her ant-like intrigues brought about results that occasioned some wonder among those who remembered the early days of the daughter of the village doctor. Elisabeth, who was incapable of taking an impartial view of Dulcie's proceedings, was simply exasperated by such of her intrigues as she perceived and understood, and was denied the satisfaction of knowing the resolution at which that young lady arrived in the course of the afternoon, to part company with her present entertainers. Dulcie, who made to-day nearly unbearable, was a figure who closed every perspective of her immediate future. She said nothing, however, whilst Dulcie—who, after all, had the qualities of her defects, and a genuine desire to make other people pleased with her—kept up her usual lively air of being perfectly at home, and ready to devote herself, her time, her energies to Mr. Holland. Only late in the day Elisabeth's self-command gave way. She had left the room after supper to speak on some household matter with Maddalena, and, returning, found Dulcie in her favorite seat on a low stool at Mr. Holland's side, reading her diary aloud. Elisabeth took up her work and sat listening for awhile ; then something in Dulcie's attitude, in her voice, in the complacency with which she retailed and commented on the trivial nothings that made up her journal, touched her beyond control. She jumped up, letting her cotton and scissors roll unheeded

from her lap on to the floor, flung her work on to the nearest table, and abruptly left the room.

She went into the dressing-room adjoining, and sat down in the dark on the window-seat. She had left the door ajar, and she could still hear the murmur of Dulcie's voice ; but she could neither distinguish the words nor see the speaker ; that at least was a gain. In a minute Elisabeth, as her way was, fell to reproaching herself for her passion ; but she could not rid herself of her deep resentment at Dulcie. She sat leaning back in the window-seat with folded arms, whilst below her spread itself out, unheeded, the wonderful spectacle of Venice at night. The echoes of a chorus, the gleam of colored lamps as an illuminated gondola floated by, came up from the water. Elisabeth closed the shutter with a sudden movement ; she wanted nothing so much as darkness and silence ; she felt inexpressibly tired, weary of herself, and everything else. The longing for flight, that haunted her at every crisis of her fate, came over her now ; the craving for liberty, the desire to cut the complications of her insoluble problem by escape. A vision crossed her mind for a moment, of wide spaces of the world where she would be alone and free—Elisabeth had still a child's belief in absolute freedom—that shook her whole soul with irrepressible longing. It was only for a moment ; all that lay outside her real life ; her life was here. Through the half-open door she still heard Dulcie's voice reading on, now and then breaking into a laugh, interrupted by some word from her auditor, then resuming its monotonous course. Presently the voice ceased ; Dulcie had risen and was wishing Mr. Holland good-night. Elisabeth heard her husband's slow step cross the floor ; a minute later he entered, carrying the lamp that had lighted the sitting-room, and passing on into the adjoining bedroom, set down the lamp on the centre table, drew his writing-case toward him, and sitting down, began to write. He paid no heed to Elisabeth, who had followed him into the room, and who now approached the table.

"Can't I do that for you ?" she said, with some timidity. He was displeased with her, she knew, and she dreaded his displeasure still.

"Thank you ; I prefer to do it myself," he said, not raising his eyes from the paper before him. Elisabeth said no more ; she sat down in an armchair by the table, and took up a book that she could not read. The lamplight shone

on her husband's pale face opposite ; his face worn and lined and refined through much suffering. She cared for him ; yes, she still cared for him with that great tenderness that is hardly less than love. He had suffered so much—how much he must have suffered if that episode in the past were indeed true. Elisabeth was young, and guilt and remorse in her idea were ineffaceable. To have sinned was to bear the weight and stain of sin through life ; that was how she felt it. She had no conception of the merciful oblivion brought by the passage of years, of the healing touch of repentance, of the efficacy of right conduct. She could be tender toward sin ; but it was to her young sense irremediable in a way. How her husband must have suffered ; how he must suffer still ! Her secret oppressed her with a terrible sense of guilt. As she sat there, looking at his bent head in the lamplight, watching the feeble movement of his hand as the pen passed over the paper, the great longing came over her again, to go to his side, to tell him of her knowledge, and ask his forgiveness in a breath. If she only dared ! Elisabeth dreaded hard words as she dreaded nothing else in life ; and yet, if she only dared. . . .

Mr. Holland laid down his pen, folded and directed his letter. "Elisabeth, I wish to speak to you," he said then in his grave, deliberate tones.

"Yes," said Elisabeth, her thought perishing in a sudden chill at his manner.

"So long," he said, in the same deliberate tones, "as Dulcie continues our guest, you would oblige me greatly by treating her with the regard due to a guest, and not with the rudeness that must cause her extreme embarrassment and discomfort."

"Dulcie is not our guest," said Elisabeth, with a sudden bitterness ; "she considers herself at home. She says so, and she makes herself at home !"

"She is at least my friend," said Mr. Holland, with emphasis ; "and as such, some consideration from you is due to her, I imagine. That she is not your friend, that you choose always to regard her with an inexplicable ill-will, is certainly your fault, and not hers."

"I do not—I do not——" began Elisabeth, and checked herself. A sense of the commonness of contention and bitter words was always strong within her ; she could not bear them. But an equal sense of truth and justice, and the strong resentment inspired by Dulcie's conduct toward

herself, compelled her to speak. She could not simply acquiesce in her husband's estimate of the matter.

"I don't wish," she began quietly enough, though her lips trembled a little, "to be wanting in consideration to Dulcie. I am sorry I vexed you this evening; one ought to be patient, I know—— It is true Dulcie is not my friend; but I don't think it is altogether my fault. I can't help seeing her as she is; I can't look upon her as you do. She is not sincere; she is never sincere! She is always pretending, always; I never really trust her at all in anything that she says. She is false throughout; I can't help feeling her to be false. I cannot make friends with a person like that!"

Elisabeth had spoken with increased heat, in spite of her effort to be tranquil—in spite of her effort even to be impartial. She wanted to judge Dulcie as she was, apart from her relations to herself. She was incapable of bringing against her any petty accusations relating to her own wrongs. Mr. Holland looked at her silently for a minute when she had done speaking.

"I am unable," he said then, "to account for a singular change in your manner in these last few days, Elisabeth. You seem to me to assert yourself strangely."

Elisabeth was confounded. "I didn't know," she faltered; "I have no wish to assert myself."

"That is possible; but I mention it because I think a little deference to my opinion on certain points would be not unbecoming. Do you imagine, for instance, that you are better able to judge of Dulcie, whose acquaintance you have made only within the last year or two, than I, who have known her since she was eight years old?"

"I don't know," said Elisabeth, despondingly; "I see her differently, I suppose. She is different with you, I know; but that doesn't alter my feeling about her. You say I assert myself; I have no wish to assert myself, but I am no longer a child, Robert. I am capable of judging of right and wrong; and it doesn't seem to me right—it seems to me wrong always to shut one's eyes."

Mr. Holland closed his writing-case, and rose from the table. "We need not discuss the matter further," he said; "your judgment of Dulcie is entirely wrong, and founded, as I am forced to suppose, on sentiments I have no desire to characterize. She has faults, no doubt; we have often spoken of them together, and she is the first to be willing to own them. That may concern me as her spiritual pas-

tor ; but if you, Elisabeth, were to study what is admirable in her, and worthy of imitation, you might learn to speak of her in a spirit of greater kindness and charity. In any case, I must beg that, while she remains with us, you will refrain from distressing her by any overt display of animosity. My dear, I should be obliged if you would prepare the sleeping-draught recommended me by Dr. Fawcett. I am very tired this evening, and at the same time restless and indisposed for sleep. I should be glad, if possible, to have a good night's rest."

Elisabeth did as she was requested ; and such satisfaction as might be derived from the fact that it was she who prepared her husband's sleeping-draught, and not Dulcie, was hers. But she herself lay long wakeful, while the clocks of Venice struck hour after hour, and the night darkened and paled over the far reaches of the lagoons.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A HAPPY PAIR.

To desire something is probably an inalienable condition of human mind, and amid the profound sadness that had settled down upon her like an immovable cloud, Elisabeth still found herself capable of wishing, with some ardor, that their stay in Venice might not be prolonged beyond the week mentioned by her husband. That was one among several conclusions that she had tried to arrive at during the wakeful hours of the night. It was not easy to arrive at conclusions ; her life seemed to her involved beyond hope and disentanglement ; but to leave Venice, where the skein had lost itself in such dreary intricacies, would at least change the immediate conditions. There was always the question, the essential question, of her husband's health ; but the summer was already advanced ; Venice might at any moment become too hot ; and now that he was so much better, it was possible the more bracing air of Thornton Briars might bring him renewed strength. Elisabeth, sick at heart, tossing restlessly, with the restlessness that believes any change may bring with it something of ease, began to think almost with longing of the old gray house, the wind-swept moorland, the lonely clumps of firs. Compared with the present, her life there,

she thought, had been one of peace; perhaps she would find the peace awaiting her return, in the still interior, between the covers of the polite volumes, in the face of her faithful handmaid. It was a delusion Elisabeth cherished for about a minute, and then she let it go. It would not do! Still, she wished to leave Venice. Emilia was coming, it was true, and Elisabeth loved Emilia; but, never wholly at ease with her sister-in-law, she dreaded the serene and sensible gaze that would at once, she believed, read all the sadness, all the forlornness and poverty of her married life, and read it perhaps coldly. If it had been the Baroness! At the very thought Elisabeth's whole soul rose in longing. If she could see the Baroness, thought the poor child, if she could see the friend whose goodness to her three years ago had won and kept her passionate gratitude, life would seem easier. She would say nothing, the Baroness would say nothing; there would be no wounding confidences or consolation; but Elisabeth felt as if all her troubles would be understood. But a hope that had been strong in her when she came to Venice, of seeing Madame von Leuwine, had died away lately; she had heard nothing of her friend since her arrival. The Baroness was always too busy to indulge in much letter-writing, and Elisabeth's last letter to her had remained unanswered. No, there was nothing to make her wish to remain in Venice; it was better to go; she wanted to get away. She was tormented, she was tortured by claims upon her powers of admiration and enjoyment, when enjoyment and admiration lay dead.

Whatever Elisabeth's wishes might be, however, they would not, as she was aware, move her husband a hair's-breadth from one purpose or another. He received her when she carried in his breakfast in the morning with something of kindness in his manner, such as lately had not unfrequently showed itself after his harsher moments. It had used to move her greatly; she was grateful for it even now. He was awake when she went in, lying propped up with pillows, jotting down some calculations in a note-book. He had slept, he said, in answer to her inquiries—"Thanks to your sleeping-draught, my dear," he added; and continued jotting down his figures before drinking the tea she poured out for him. In a minute he spoke again.

"Have you any money, my dear?"

"I have the five francs you gave me on my dress ac-

count, out of the change from the chemists' bill," said Elisabeth. She had also the change from the five-pound note she had taken to the money changer's; but she had entirely forgotten it for the moment.

"Then, my dear, I should wish you to take a gondola and go out with Dulcie this morning. On the whole, and after due consideration, I believe it will be best for me to adhere to my plan of leaving this in a week; and I should wish Dulcie to see what she can of Venice before leaving. She is not strong; she is not like you, who can walk any distance, and it will be well for her, therefore, to have a gondola. The expense, I believe, is not great; and as you have already visited various places, you can take her to what is best worth seeing. I should not wish her, as she is in my charge, to go about alone."

"I will go, of course," said Elisabeth, glad to have so easy a duty to perform to Dulcie. In the watches of the night she had resolved to be better to Dulcie. Dulcie was inevitable, it appeared; well, so much was inevitable! It was her own impatience, Elisabeth decided, gazing with her sad young eyes through the darkness, that made the inevitable so hard to bear. Well, she would try to be patient.

Afterwards Elisabeth found that she retained a singular memory of every detail of that morning's excursion, through which she went with a listlessness that still seemed to herself incredible. She could not understand how trouble should have power to dim earth and the sunlight and the sky; she wondered at herself. The two girls found little to say to each other as they sat together in the gondola. Dulcie had brought a red guide-book with her, in which she was absorbed. Elisabeth sat silent at her side, occasionally answering a question or giving a direction to the gondolier, looking through darkness, so it seemed to her, at this changed Venice of her dreams. And yet, afterward, each detail seemed to live in her memory. She remembered the glowing sunlight, the ardent heat, the scarlet of the pomegranate-trees bursting into flower over garden walls, the figures crossing the bridges against the sky, the swirl of light and color in the water, the pavement that felt burning to their feet as they ascended and descended the steps of the church or *riva*, the scent of white lilies here and there in the air, the yellow and red and crimson of the cherries piled beneath red striped awnings in some sunny corner of a *campo*. These things, and such

as these, burnt themselves into her memory; but what places they visited she remembered afterwards hardly at all. She left the choice and the direction to Dulcie, who wanted to see Carpaccio and Tintoretto, she said, and who proceeded to select from her guide-book such Tintorettos and Carpaccios as she first wished to see. They found themselves at last in the Accademia; it was the hottest day they had yet had, and Elisabeth, tired from her wakeful night, fatigued by the oppressive atmosphere of the rooms, sat down on a sofa opposite Titian's great Presentation in the Temple, whilst Dulcie wandered away with her guide-book. Elisabeth closed her eyes more in mental than in physical somnolence; she was glad to see nothing, to think of nothing, for a moment. She was roused by a familiar voice at her side.

"Don't let me disturb you, my dear Elisabeth, if you are really asleep! Otherwise, I am delighted to find you here, that we may have a little chat together."

Elisabeth started up in amazement. Mrs. Sparrow was the last person she would have expected to meet in the Accademia. That excellent woman was quite above pretences of any kind; a missionary tract, frankly, had more attraction for her than the finest picture in the world. And yet here she was; and not only here, but cheerful, beaming, jocose even, to a degree and after a fashion that Elisabeth had never beheld in her before. Her attire corresponded to her countenance; it was a Wednesday, and yet she wore her Sunday brown silk and best green bonnet, surmounted by a parrot's wing, and fastened with a topaz brooch that gave the last festive touch to her appearance. She also wore a pair of stiff, bright-colored gloves, whose shape bore no special relation to her hands, but whose newness and freshness of hue were highly decorative. Elisabeth was accustomed to Mrs. Sparrow's raiment, modest in material, brilliant in effect; but there was a certain radiance about her to-day quite new in her experience of her.

"You are surprised to see me, my dear Elisabeth," she said; "and it is true I have little leisure, as a rule, for what is called sight-seeing—a sad waste of time, indeed, it generally seems to me. Still, there are occasions when one must set aside one's own more useful occupations out of consideration for others, and then even frivolous pursuits may be considered sanctified. Who do you think is with me? But sit down, my dear Elisabeth; we can

talk more at ease, and there is little here, I confess, that *I* desire to look at. Sad heathen subjects all these old pictures seem to be ; and I shall call my young people away directly. Who do you suppose is with me ?"

"Is Mary here ?" said Elisabeth, unable to frame any other conjecture.

"Mary is here, certainly ; but who do you think is with her ? There, you can see them together now, standing with their backs toward us. You don't recognize him ? Well, three years do make a difference in us all—Herr Nauders, my dear ; yes, Herr Nauders ! He arrived quite unexpectedly at Frau Werner's three days ago, and yesterday he proposed for Mary. His father is dead ; it was he, it seems, who always opposed the marriage ; but he found he couldn't live without Mary, and here he is ?"

"Oh, I'm glad—I am very glad !" said Elisabeth. "That is what you wished, dear Mrs. Sparrow."

"Yes, my dear—yes. We are truly thankful for Mary's happiness ; and much as we liked Herr Nauders before, I must say he is wonderfully improved. There are some drawbacks ; there always are, I suppose. The poor young man has not nearly so large a fortune as he had reason to expect ; in fact, he has hardly any. His father made some rash speculations before his death, and lost nearly all he possessed. Still, William—his name is William, though he writes it, of course, the German way—William has a Church already, not a very lucrative one, but enough for a young couple to begin upon : and riches, after all, are a snare. I couldn't truly wish my child to have the temptation, Elisabeth, though the flesh is weak. Of course the marriage is not everything one could desire ; to have had Mary established as you are, my dear, that would have fulfilled all my wishes. But it is not every young girl who has a chance such as you have had."

"No !" said Elisabeth. "Mary is happy though, I hope," she went on. "I remember, I used to think she liked Herr Nauders."

"Happy, poor child ?—she can hardly speak for happiness ! Yes, there they are together, you see. Herr Nauners has never seen Venice, so he made a list out of the guide-book, and we are going to each place in turn. I'm rather sorry we came in here, though ; I am afraid Herr Nauders may be shocked, perhaps."

Herr Nauders, who turned round at this moment, did not look at all shocked. He was still a pale and snub-

nosed young man, but with a face of the most beaming and smiling aspect as he moved briskly off with his betrothed at his side to look at another picture. Mary, on the other hand, had an air of preternatural gravity, induced by the solemnity of the occasion. She glanced furtively, without smiling, at Elisabeth as they passed, whilst her mother nodded and beamed at them with a wave of her hand.

"You don't know, my dear," she said, turning again to Elisabeth, "what a relief this engagement, with all its drawbacks, is to me. Ah, my dear, night after night I have lain awake, thinking what would become of Mary if her father and I were to die; and, in the nature of things, we must die some day. With all our savings—and no one knows what saving can be till they try; if you'll believe me, Elisabeth, I have not spent ten pounds on my clothes this year—I, who have to keep up an appearance suitable to our position; with all our savings, I say, we have been able to put by very little; and though I have often blamed myself for want of faith, the flesh *is* weak when one thinks of one's only child coming to real want, perhaps. It seems hard, Elisabeth, that a man like Mr. Sparrow, who has worked and labored in the vineyard for years, should still have to wrestle with worldly cares. Everything is appointed for the best, we know, and it is not for us to murmur; but if the laborer is worthy of his hire, it does seem as if things should be arranged a little differently."

"Oh, I think it is very hard," said Elisabeth. "I know it seems sometimes as if one could think of nothing else when one has to calculate every shilling that one spends."

"Ah, my dear, things are very different with you. A vicar's wife and a living like Thornton Briars, not to mention your own fortune! And all that to come to you before you are old enough to know what a struggle means, even. Certainly, worldly lots are very differently apportioned! Still, with Mary happily married, if we are only permanently appointed to the new church at Schlossberg—and I don't see how we can be passed over—I shall feel that blessings are multiplied indeed. And that reminds me, my dear Elisabeth, to thank you for your kind contribution to our little collection the other day. Every little helps, you know, and your offering will be blessed, I have no doubt. You must thank your excellent husband too, my dear."

"Oh, don't thank us!" said Elisabeth, suddenly rising;

"I mean it was nothing; don't, please, ever think of it again. I'm afraid I must go now, Mrs. Sparrow; it is getting near our dinner-hour. Mary has gone into the other room, I see; but please tell her from me how glad I am to hear of her engagement. I do hope she will be happy."

Elisabeth spoke with warmth; and as she spoke, her eyes filled with tears. Mrs. Sparrow looked at her with surprise that changed into solicitude.

"My dear," she said, "you are not looking well. Are you taking proper care of yourself? You used to be so sadly heedless, Elisabeth! and I dare say your husband, good as he is, never thinks about your health. Men never do, you know, until one is really ill, and then they are as vexed with one as can be. Do you take proper food and exercise, my dear? These are things, you know, that should never be neglected."

"Oh, I do," said Elisabeth, smiling a little. "I walk and eat a great deal, I think. I am quite well. I'm very strong, you know; only to-day I'm a little tired. It's the heat, I suppose."

"Yes, that is what Mr. Sparrow says. He feels the heat too. I could wish on his account that we were to leave Venice now, as we had intended. We were to have gone to that Swiss place, you know; but there has been some mistake, and Mr. Sparrow is to take August and September there, instead of July and August. It vexed him a little at first, but no doubt it is all ordained for the best. But take care of yourself, my dear, and don't overwalk in this heat. Are you here alone?"

"No," said Elisabeth, looking round; "Miss Fawcett is with me. She is staying with us, you know, and I came with her this morning, as she wanted to see the pictures. I think I must go and find her now. It hurts my husband to be kept waiting for his dinner."

"That is quite right, my dear—to think of your husband's comfort, I mean—and very thoughtless of Miss Fawcett to keep you waiting. I remember, Mr. Sparrow told me he had seen her at your house one day, and he didn't seem to think much of her. She was pretty, he said, but he fancied she was a sly girl. He didn't say that exactly, but that was the impression he gave me. Is that she coming up to us now? Well, she is a pretty creature, Elisabeth—that I must say for her; and thinks a good deal of it, I dare say, as such girls will."

"I don't think she does," said Elisabeth, with perfect candor. Vanity had never seemed to her among Miss Fawcett's failings. The young girl, indeed, had one of those faces that vary so much from day to day, that though there were times when she might pass as a beauty, there were others when she was almost plain. To-day she looked, in fact, charming, in a fresh blue and white cambric gown. She came up to Elisabeth and addressed her, fanning herself the while and looking, smiling, at Mrs. Sparrow.

"Don't you think we had better go?" she said. "I have been waiting in the next room till you seemed quite to have finished your conversation. But it is getting late, you know, and Mr. Holland has often told me how much he suffers when he is kept waiting for dinner. Want of punctuality is one of the things he most suffers from, he says."

"Let us go," said Elisabeth, briefly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IRREVOCABLE.

They reached home some few minutes before the dinner-hour. Dulcie disappeared to take off her hat, and Elisabeth, who had some direction to give Maddalena, went on into the kitchen. There was a sound of voices as she opened the door, and she found the old woman in company with the postman, who, immediately on Elisabeth's entrance, handed her a registered letter, together with a book to sign. Maddalena, who was busy preparing to carry the soup into the dining-room, explained the man's presence there.

"He came this morning," she said, "at the usual hour; but you were out, signora, and the signore was sound asleep after dressing himself, so that it would be a sin to disturb him, I thought. So I told the man to come again, as you would be in for certain by two o'clock, and he is this moment arrived."

Elisabeth signed the receipt and thrust the letter into her pocket. She had hardly glanced at the address, but she had seen that the handwriting was strange to her, and she hardly doubted from whom it had come; she felt sure it

was from Mr. Brudenel. She stood still for a moment gazing at Maddalena, till she was able to remember what errand had brought her into the kitchen; then she went away quickly to take off her hat and prepare for dinner. She could not read her letter then; she did not want to read it. An utter dismay filled her heart; she would have given the world never to have written to Mr. Brudenel; she ought not to have written, she felt, with a sickening misgiving. She had dreaded and hoped for this answer, but she felt nothing but dread now. Whatever was in the letter, it could only give her some horrible pain. She had not expected to hear from him so soon, having calculated that the following day was the earliest on which an answer could reach her; but she was imperfectly acquainted with the Italian post, and could easily suppose her calculation to have been wrong. Now and then during dinner she felt for the letter in her pocket; it lay there like a guilty consciousness. If she could have destroyed it unread, she would have been thankful to do so; but she could not do that—she could not! She ate hardly anything; she left all the conversation to Dulcie. There was something, she knew, that she had intended to tell her husband; only a long while afterward she remembered that it was of Mary Sparrow's engagement. Presently she was impressed by what had not at first struck her—the thickness of the letter, and the fact that it had been registered. Mr. Brudenel must have returned the money she had sent, and in that case the whole story must be false. A burning flush rose to Elisabeth's face. She had hoped—all along she had hoped more than she knew—that that was what the letter would tell her; but in having accepted the accusation against her husband she felt like a criminal.

She went, as usual, to his room after dinner, to close and shade the windows, and arrange sofa-pillows and coverlet for the half-hour's rest he always took in the afternoon. Elisabeth lingered over the business; she made it as long as possible. "That will do, my dear," Mr. Holland said at last, and she had no excuse for remaining. She passed into the little frescoed room adjoining, closed the door, and taking the letter from her pocket, sat staring at it for a while as it lay before her in her lap. She magnified its contents; she sat trembling as though it were about to pass a judgment on her own past life and her husband's. At last she broke the seals in haste, opening the letter desperately. The packet of notes fell out,

and lay unheeded on the floor. A written sheet lay within. Elisabeth took it out and read.

"DEAR MADAM" (the letter ran).

"I write at once to relieve you of an anxiety that I beg to assure you is unfounded. The debt of which you speak was settled and done with long ago; to set your mind entirely at rest, I may add that it was repaid at once by a near relation of your husband. I regret very much that an affair which I have always chosen to regard as personal—as lying, that is, between your husband and myself—should in any way have come to your knowledge. Of the three or four persons cognizant of it, two at least are dead; I had imagined, I had hoped, that the whole thing now lay, in fact, between your husband and myself, a forgotten memory.

"Since it has unhappily revived, to give you, I fear, some uneasiness, I write these few lines of explanation; but if you will permit the advice of an old man, you will allow the matter to pass from your mind as though it had never been. We have to thank God's mercy that our errors, whatever their ultimate consequences may be, do not necessarily affect our whole conduct in life; and, speaking for myself, your husband has always had my warm admiration and respect as one of the most devoted and energetic workers it has been my fortune to meet with. It grieved me much to hear from you that his health had broken down; and it would have given me so much pleasure to meet him again, that I greatly regret the event that took you from London the day after I had the fortunate chance of making your acquaintance. I called at your lodging, but found you already gone. Perhaps, if you pass through London again, you will allow me the gratification of continuing an acquaintance that ended too abruptly, and of renewing an old friendship that I greatly value.

"Believe me to remain, dear madam,

"Very faithfully and sincerely yours,

"ARTHUR BRUDENEL."

The paper fell from Elisabeth's hand. No, not until now had she known how greatly she built upon the hope that this letter would clear her husband, and prove the story a lie. It was no lie—it was plain and literal truth; between the guarded words she could read the truth. And yet the words worked in her a strange reaction, a sense of

wasted emotion, of reproof to herself that perplexed and confounded her. The calm wisdom of the old man found no response in her heart—not yet. A tragedy that had rent her life in two could not pass from her mind as though it had never been ; she could not sit witness, as it were, to a great moral degradation in her husband, then rise from that sorry spectacle and let the curtain fall indifferent upon the scene. It was there, it was there ; behind the curtain it was always there. Not the less, she felt thrown back upon herself, beaten to the ground. She sat gazing drearily before her, her hands folded in her lap. Her life was broken, and there was nothing left for her to do ; she did not see what she was to do. Presently she picked up Mr. Brudenel's letter from the floor and spread it on the table before her. She must answer it, she thought, and acknowledge the money, or he might write again. She could not have him write again ; she would answer it, and that part of the business would be closed for ever.

She had written but three lines—she hardly meant to write more ; in the simplest words she would thank him for his letter and for the money—she had written, I say, but three lines when she heard a slow hand laid upon the handle of the door that communicated with the adjoining bed-room. Elisabeth sprang startled to her feet. Her husband very rarely came into this little room she had appropriated to her own use. He had not indeed remonstrated, but he had disapproved, she felt, tacitly of the arrangement, as an assumption of independence. She kept her books there, and he did not care about her books ; she wrote her few letters there to Emilia, to the Baroness, and he would have preferred that that correspondence should cease. "I fail to understand, my dear, the pleasure you find in shutting yourself up alone," he had said to her once or twice in the beginning of their stay in Venice ; and Elisabeth had been careful to shut herself up only at such hours as he himself was resting, to be in the sitting-room before he made his tardy appearance in the morning, or took his place for the afternoon in the armchair by the window. But to-day she had failed to note the lapse of time. Her husband's hand fumbled for a moment with the lock, the door opened, and he stood with his slight stoop and worn face on the threshold.

"Are you here, my dear?" he said. "I cannot imagine, Elisabeth, the pleasure you find——"

He broke off, his attention caught by her startled air,

and advanced a step further into the room. His eye fell upon the packet of bank-notes that still lay unheeded on the floor, where they had fallen when Elisabeth opened the letter. He stooped to pick it up; he looked at the notes, counting them twice over one by one, and turned his eyes upon Elisabeth.

"What is this?" he said. "Where did this money come from?"

He waited a minute, but Elisabeth did not answer; not through want of will, but through sheer want of power to speak. She stood trembling; she was terrified by the catastrophe.

He spoke again.

"Where did this money come from?" he said. "You will oblige me, Elisabeth, by an answer to my question. I find you—*you*— in possession of nearly a hundred pounds without my knowledge. I have a right, I demand, to know how it came into your hands!"

"I have had it—it is mine——" began Elisabeth. She went on with more coherence: "I have had it a long time," she said. "It was a present from Baroness von Leuwine; she sent it to me the day before I married. She told me to put it away and say nothing about it. I—I am sorry ——" She broke off, faltering under the expression of her husband's eye.

"You have had it a long time?" he said; "you have had it for three years and said nothing about it? You have been aware that I have been in straits for money, that the strictest economy has been necessary to me in every direction, and you have kept a sum like this concealed, hidden away for private purposes, I suppose to serve your private ends! It is yours, you say; I have yet to learn that a wife's interests are to be so considered apart from her husband's. Is that your idea of wifely duty?"

"Oh, it is not so, it is not so!" cried Elisabeth. "I did mean to give it to you—I did. You do not understand."

"I do not understand?" he said. "I am not so dull of comprehension."

"No, you do not understand," she said, desperately. "The Baroness sent me the money; it was sealed up; I had no idea how much there was; she didn't say. She told me only to keep it, that some time I might want money; I was not to open it until then. I didn't know how much there was; I never thought about it until the other day; and then, when I could not—I could not ask

Mrs. Sparrow for the money back, I looked. But I did mean to give it to you ; I meant to give it to you at once."

"You gave me forty francs," said Mr. Holland, with chill irony ; "that was a week ago. May I ask why you did not carry out your intention ?"

Elisabeth did not answer ; she could not answer ; she did not know what to say ; but involuntarily her hand covered Mr. Brudenel's letter, that lay open before her on the table. Her husband's eyes followed her movement ; his glance fell on the registered envelope with its broken seals, in which the letter had come.

"What is all this ?" he said, taking it up and looking at the address. Suddenly he fixed his eyes on his wife again, with a look that appalled her. "What is all this ?" he repeated, striking the paper with his hand. "Who sent you this ? Have the goodness to give me the letter that came in it."

He seized the sheet of paper on which Elisabeth had begun to write, glanced at the first words, and pulled the letter she held from under her hand. Elisabeth threw herself forward to regain possession.

"Not that !" she said ; "don't read that letter ! I will tell you—I will tell you——"

Her voice failed ; he took hold of her wrist and held her back forcibly, his hand trembling with the effort it cost him, while he read the first two or three lines. A dreadful pallor came over his face.

"Come with me," he said. Still holding her wrist with one hand, the papers with the other, he passed through into the bedroom, and sank down upon the sofa. "Have the goodness to sit down," he said, loosening his hold, but not raising his eyes ; and Elisabeth, helpless to oppose him, dropped into the nearest chair. He read through Mr. Brudenel's letter without speaking ; he read it twice, he read the answer she had begun, then, crushing them together in his hand, flung them from him to the furthest corner of the room, and turned upon her. The pallor was gone from his face ; it was flushed, and there was a terrible anger in his eyes.

"You wrote to Mr. Brudenel ?" he said.

"Yes, I wrote to him," said Elisabeth, with a long sigh, letting her hands fall by her side. The worst moment was come ; nothing could be worse than this ; it deadened sensation ; it almost annihilated terror.

"You sent him the money ?"

"Yes," she said again, "I sent it. I thought it right."

He moved a little, placing both hands on the sofa, as if to rise. "You thought it right?" he said. "Who made you the judge? In what does it concern you? Who are you to make or meddle in the matter?"

He paused, but Elisabeth did not speak.

"If," he went on, his voice gathering force as he spoke, "I committed an error years ago, of which years ago I repented, what is that to you? Who—who are you, to presume to thrust yourself in? The matter is one that concerns myself alone; it lies between me and my God."

He rose; he stood towering above her in his anger.

"Go!" he said, pointing to the door; "I repent the day that I first saw you; I would to Heaven I had never set eyes on you; I could pray that I might never see you again!"

He pointed to the door for her to go, and Elisabeth went.

CHAPTER XL.

DULCIE MAKES HERSELF USEFUL AGAIN.

She went back into the little salottino, and, sitting down by the table, laid her head upon her arms. She did not think at first, not for a long time; she did not feel; afterward it seemed to her as though she must have even slept a little; a sort of numbness had fallen upon her. Presently, however, with a start, as it were, although she sat without moving, the swiftest current of thought began to pass through her brain. She felt outraged, wounded to the heart, scathed by the bitter contempt and anger of her husband's words; and yet through it all she was conscious of a certain reconcilement between her spirit and his. He had sinned, but he had repented; yes, he was right in what he had said: his past lay between God and himself. Elisabeth recognized it with a pang of humility and remorse. Who indeed was she that she should judge? For her also that dark passage in her husband's past should be effaced. But not the less she felt the separation between them to be complete. It was not only that, not only that! That was but the bitter end of all that had gone before. Her husband's last words rang cruelly in her ears; she put her hands to her ears as though to shut them out;

she had not thought words could be so cruel. She had known, she had tried so hard not to know, that he no longer loved her ; but now she felt he could never have loved her—never. The last pale ashes of that hearth she had feared to desecrate were scattered to the winds ; nay, the hearth itself had sunk into an abyss ; she sat gazing on an immense void.

She would go away, she presently resolved. She had thought of that so often before ; always in any great trouble in her life, that thought had crossed her mind ; but now she made the resolution in earnest. Her husband repented the day that he had first seen her. Well, he should never see her again. The bitter tears of wounded pride, of slain affection, of passionate resentment, forced themselves to Elisabeth's eyes ; he should never see her again. A sob rose at the thought of the infinite loss of her life, but her resolution did not waver ; on the contrary, the details of a plan succeeded each other in her mind with extreme clearness and rapidity. She had money ; that was the first, the essential point. The bank-notes still lay on the table ; her husband had forgotten them in his new cause for agitation, and Elisabeth could feel no scruple in using them. They were her own, she said to herself ; alas ! could the Baroness have foreseen such a moment as this when she made her marriage gift ? Of Italian money she had enough left to carry her across the frontier ; that would save her the loss of time involved in going to a money-changer's ; the afternoon was wearing away ; she could not meet her husband again, she wanted to be gone. A train, as she knew, left Venice within the next few hours ; only yesterday she had been searching the time-table for hours and routes, in view of their approaching journey to England. There were no difficulties, no obstacles. She would go to some distant foreign city where no one would know her, or be able to discover her ever ; and there, before all her money was spent, she would find some way to support herself. She would study, she would give lessons, not minding how simply she lived ; she would find some little room where she could keep her books, to which she could go back every evening and feel herself alone and free. All Elisabeth's young blood sprang to meet the thought ; she would be free. A vision borrowed from her old Schlossberg days, of some high set chamber looking across strange foreign roofs and spires to red sunset skies, crossed her mind. Through all her

troubles a throb of excitement made itself felt ; the world was before her again, the world of her imagination, to wander into and possess. The narrow horizons opened, dreamland rushed in, and the old enchanted light. . . .

She came to herself with a sudden pang. Of what had she been thinking? Her husband was there ; she ought not to go ; it would be terrible to go. If she could no longer love her husband, she could at least be loyal to him ; she had said that to herself too often not to say it again now. To live with him with the sense that she was hateful in his eyes would be impossible ; but she remembered his gentler moments, his return to a kinder mood ; with his scorching words burning in her mind she could still remember these. Her mind returned upon itself. He had wounded her profoundly ; she did not know how such a wound could ever heal, but she had wounded him also ; yes, Elisabeth understood something of that. And then there was the money—she ought to have given it to him, she supposed ; all along she had known how much he would care about that. She laid her head down on her folded arms again ; she felt horribly lonely and perplexed and confused, and there was no one to advise her or help.

She drew a sheet of paper toward her at last. She would write to her husband, that would be best ; and then she did not know what to write. Her perception that in his eyes she was greatly to blame, and her habit of accepting blame, came to her help. It seemed to herself, indeed, that she ought to have acted differently, though, looking back, she did not see what else she could have done ; it had been so essential to her to do something! She wrote at last, lamely enough, she was aware—she could not say what she did not feel—but in the best words she could find.

"Forgive me, Robert," she wrote. "I ought, I believe, to have given you the money before ; you think me greatly to blame, I know. But your anger makes me very unhappy. Will you not forgive me? I don't know how we are to go on living at all if you do not ; and how can I care for anything so much as that you should be good to me?

"ELISABETH."

She folded the paper, enclosed it with the notes in an envelope, and calling to Maddalena, bade the old woman

take it to her master. Then she sat down and waited, feeling that nothing mattered much now, since she had given the money away ; however much she might wish to escape, she had shut herself off from it effectually. In hardly two minutes Maddalena returned, looking rather queerly at her young mistress.

"The signore bade me give you this," she said, with some hesitation, holding out a letter. Elisabeth took it from her, looked at it, and held it in her hand till the old woman had left the room. It was her own letter sent back to her. The envelope had been opened, and within lay the money as she had enclosed it, and her own note torn across.

Afterward, in considering this money returned on her hands, Elisabeth measured the depth of her husband's resentment ; but, looking now at her rejected words, she felt that, had he struck her, the insult could hardly have been so great. Her cheeks burned ; a passion of indignation possessed her such as she had never known before. She lost no more time in thought ; she rose from her seat, and throwing away the fragments of paper, secured the bank-notes in her little travelling pocket-book ; then, passing into the adjoining room, began to make brief preparations for a journey. The practical business of travelling had fallen too exclusively on Elisabeth in these last years for her to feel any embarrassment in the prospect of setting out alone ; she knew exactly what she meant to do and how to do it. She went rapidly about it all ; she did not want to pause and think now. She packed some linen, some books, her gray stuff Sunday gown, into a light travelling bag ; she put on her hat, and sitting down, wrote one more note to her husband. In the fewest words possible she bade him farewell. He had told her that he repented ever having seen her ; she would never trouble him again—never ! Some day, perhaps, he would forgive her and think of her more kindly ; that was the hope she went away with ; that, and the hope—the hope—that he would be happy. Elisabeth signed her name through blinding tears, but she dashed them quickly away. She directed and stamped this letter ; she would post it, she thought, at the station, so that her husband should not get it until she had left Venice. Now that she had decided on flight, she dreaded the complication of discovery. Then, throwing her travelling cloak over her arm, she took up the bag—she had selected a light one, but it was heavy, nevertheless,

and pulled at her arm a little—and passing through the entry, opened the door on to the great staircase. Her plan was to carry the bag to the water-entrance of the palazzo, and call a gondola from the *traghetto* hard by. She had no fear of meeting anyone; the staircase was always empty—they had no visitor but Mr. Sparrow; and at the first landing she set down her bag in a dark corner and ran up-stairs again. She had left the door ajar, and crossing the entry, she went to find Maddalena in the kitchen.

"Maddalena," she said, "I am going out, and shall not be back to tea. You must take it in, and see that the signore has everything he wants."

"Yes, yes," said the old woman; "I shall see to it; he shall want for nothing. The signora does well to take a little air; she will have one of her bad headaches again; I can see that by her looks."

"No, that is nothing," said Elisabeth. "But be sure, Maddalena, that the signore has everything he wants."

Her voice faltered with the last words. She turned quickly away and ran down-stairs again, closing the door after her this time. But as she laid her hand on her bag, she paused once more. Her own words had moved her too deeply. Her husband had driven her from his side; but the thought of him without her, of her place at his side always vacant—that was the point of pathos that had power to pierce and shake her strongest resolution even now. She ran up-stairs once more and rang the bell.

"I have forgotten something, Maddalena," she said, almost inaudibly, as the old woman opened the door.

She passed through the entry into the antechamber overlooking the canal. She would go straight to her husband, she thought; there was nothing now, no miserable secret, no untoward knowledge on her part to stand between them. She would brave his anger, she would set aside her pride and ask him to be good to her; she would so plead that he would surely yield, and their old life, such life as had still been possible to either, begin again. After all, she was his wife!

As she laid her hand on the lock of the sitting-room door, she paused a moment to gather courage. The afternoon was warm and still; there was not even the splash of an oar on the shadowed water below, only the intermittent buzz of flies; and in the silence she could hear

Dulcie's voice as she sat reading to her husband in the adjoining room.

Then Elisabeth turned again ; and this time she did not come back.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE.

One rainy morning, nearly a month later, Elisabeth, alighting from an early train, found herself standing once more in the familiar station at Schlossberg.

Elisabeth had spent one day in Munich after leaving Venice ; but though beforehand she had dreamed of cities, she was scared when she found herself there alone. She trembled as she walked through the streets ; at every corner she feared to meet some face she knew. Once she fancied she saw her husband ; he might have guessed her destination, she thought, and followed her by the next train. She immediately perceived that she was mistaken ; a moment's reflection, indeed, assured her that she must have been mistaken ; but the alarm remained. She could not stay in Munich ; she would hide away for a time in some quiet, out-of-the-way place, where she could think over and definitively fix what she would next do. She bought a guide-book and decided on a little Tyrolese village, attracted by the description of the beauty of its scenery. Only inexperience could have led her to suppose herself more likely to escape notice in such a place than in the crowds of a great city. But fortune favored her ; it was too early in the season for the rush of tourists, and Elisabeth, for the most part, was alone in her little inn, looked after by its kindly people, whose wonder, if they felt any, at the young girl who lingered on there alone, could at least do her no harm.

Three weeks after leaving Venice, Elisabeth, thinking the matter over—she had thought of little else day and night—still felt that she had done what was best. Our heroine, as she sits at the casement of a little wooden room watching the sunset glow creep up a mountain-side, looked hardly older than the Schlossberg school-girl of three years back ; she was in some respects hardly wiser. Experience is apt to come tardily through a life imposed on us by others ; of inward experience, indeed, Elisabeth

had had abundance ; but of that other experience that adjusts our relations with the outer world, that rubs off the crude angles of ignorance and fills up the *lacunes* left by the grammars and primers of our youth, her suppressed and monotonous life with Mr. Holland had afforded her but little. Elisabeth had, besides, that difficulty in assimilating experience common to natures that live greatly by the imagination, who pass through illusion to disillusion back to illusion, without calculation of consequences. It would take her long to grow old ; to the end of her life she might, in some directions, still remain young. As she sat now, with her chin propped on her hands, a book that she was not reading lying open on her knee, she said to herself again that she had done what was best. She did not say that she had done what was right ; in that dismal tangle into which her life had wound itself, right and wrong had become so perplexed that her mind refused to make the final decision ; if the right lay here or there, so much still remained that was wrong. But she had done what was best. There were times during these hours of solitude when Elisabeth, reviewing the past three years, judged her husband with extraordinary severity ; every meanness, every pettiness of his nature, seemed to start up in the glaring light this clearer judgment threw on it ; she recalled even that sorry incident of the hundred-mark note he had lent her, and in what way he had reclaimed it. Her cheeks burned with shame and indignation ; how could he have treated her so, an inexperienced child as she was in those days ? There were other times when she fell into passionate weeping over her broken life. Her husband had never really loved her—the love that had sufficed for both had all been hers—that was the tardy conviction that weighed upon her most of all. If her mind could have dwelt on one remembrance that she might have cherished to grieve over, it would have been easier, she thought ; but she only interrogated the past to find it all a deception and a blank. And now her love also was gone.

Occasionally, she forgot her troubles altogether in the stirring of her young blood, in the joy of freedom in the free mountain land. Elisabeth had always longed with an insatiable thirst for liberty ; and now, in this brief moment of liberty, it did not disappoint her. If only she could have banished thought ! But as the days went on, thought became not less, but more importunate. Her waking hours were restless, her sleep broken. Sometimes she would

awake suddenly in the darkness, fancying she heard her husband call. "I am coming, Robert!" she would cry, starting up in bed, bewildered at first by her strange surroundings; then sinking back on her pillow, would break into sobs and tears again. On what might have occurred after her departure from Venice she never allowed herself to dwell. She imagined no regret on her husband's part; it was impossible, after what had passed, that she should; but she had a vision of terrible anger, and his anger was a great dread to her even here. Of his health she thought often with an anxiety that, growing constantly more uneasy, contributed most of all to her restlessness. Sometimes she caught herself watching for the post, thinking it must surely bring her a letter; it was so strange to have no news, no tidings; the silence grew upon her as the days passed by. Once, even, she packed her bag in the resolution to return at any cost; and then the words her husband had spoken returned like insults flung in her face to pelt her back; she would never thrust herself on him again—never. And then two other considerations held her back. The first was the conviction that she cherished almost ever since they came to Venice, that her husband's illness had taken a favorable turn; she had persuaded herself he was on the way to recovery. The other was the low estimate he himself had obliged her to form of her necessity to his comfort. He had allowed her to do so little for him, he had so rarely expressed any pleasure in such service as she rendered, that she had no conception—it made the tragedy of the present situation and its sequel that he had made it impossible she should have a conception—of how necessary she was to his comfort. Nothing of what she had done but could be done as well by another—that he would not (she could only imagine, things being as they were) prefer should be done by another. It was the saddest point in her meditations; she recurred to it again and again. "He does not want me—he does not want me!" she said to herself. "He would rather I were away."

This conviction it was that, as the days went on and she began more definitely to shape her future, helped her more than any other to give it form. Her thoughts had turned not seldom to the Baroness. Some project she had had of making her way to that kind and excellent friend, of telling her as much as she could of her story—part of it she would never tell, never—of seeking her advice, her

sympathy, of asking her to hide and protect her. But the probability that her husband might seek her there, her vague terrors of what might ensue, withheld her at first, and as the days passed on her project became weaker. Not merely to leave her husband, but to break utterly with her past, to vanish forever into the great mass of humanity, beginning a new life on her own account, and leaving him free to begin one on his—that was the young scheme, rich in the imprudence and inexperience of youth, that began to commend itself to Elisabeth. She welcomed it with the same strange throb of exhilaration that had attended her first project of flight. It presented no difficulties to her imagination. To feign death—such feigning would be easy: some last lines to her husband, a hat and handkerchief found caught in weeds on a river bank; a hundred romances offered her a precedent—then to dive deep below the surface, and rise again with changed name, untrammelled and unknown, in some far, unthought-of land and city. It was a scheme that offered the strangest attractions to her fancy, and it would leave her husband free—he might marry Dulcie then! That was a thought that rose unbidden in her mind, to be banished as soon as it came. Elisabeth had not been seriously jealous of Dulcie; she had never supposed, that is—she did not suppose now—that her husband had ever been guilty of an unworthy thought toward herself. Her imagination, that took such strange leaps in certain directions, had but a narrow outlook toward cheap and vulgar wickedness. Her jealousy, which had in truth been deep and real enough within its limits, had been largely owing to irritation that her husband should be imposed upon by a nature whose shallowness and insincerity she had seen so clearly. Not the less, his open and constant preference for Dulcie's ways and Dulcie's conduct had worked upon her, as we know. "She would have made him a better wife—he would have been happier so;" that had been her inward cry long before this. "He does not want me. If he were free he could marry her;" that was the formula that began to grow upon her. "If he were really free!" Elisabeth thought, and wished that she were dead; but with no thought of real death in her mind. To pass in very truth from the world, with all the rich possibilities of this life untried, with the possibilities of the next life all vague and unknown—that was a thought that she could not entertain for a moment.

But a feigned suicide—would it be right or wrong? That was the dilemma that held her. It may be said that in this reaction from the sadness and sordidness of her later years, hardly one strictly practical consideration visited Elisabeth's dreams; she measured neither the limits of her own nature nor the resources of life. Even her money seemed to her at first a fairyland of inexhaustible treasure. She had never possessed money to spend at will before; she could not understand it. She overpaid everyone at first, suffering at once pangs of remorse and a secret joy, yet recommencing at the first opportunity. Nevertheless, when, after a fortnight's stay at the inn, her bill was laid before her, Elisabeth did awake to more practical considerations. There had been moments when, among her other dreams, she had dreamed of living on and on in the seclusion of this green mountain-side, getting books for herself, and studying them to the accompaniment of bubbling stream and rushing waterfall, and the melodious clang and tinkle of goat and cow bells. Such a life, she felt sure, would satisfy her for a long time: peace and solitude, the sweet breath of the mountains, the sense of a wide world awaiting her beyond. Elisabeth imposed no delusion on herself here; something, not a little, of the self-sufficing spirit of the student and the dreamer was hers. The sunset and the sunrise, the moon and stars, the immensity of the heavens, the far horizons of the world seen from some narrow student's chamber, all that still lingered in her mind as an ideal of life. Another ideal she had also had, that lay now as a beggar's garment, rent and tattered and discredited, to be wept over and shuddered at. But clad in the royal raiment of her dreams, Elisabeth could still believe at times that all the sadness, all the dismal failures of these later years, were but accidents, the wretched sport of fate; not, in one shape or another among the constant conditions of human life. Her mind wavered to and fro, now in restless desire to stretch her strong young wings and soar away, now in sadder longing to heal that outraged past among the voices and silences of the mountains. But the dull document presented to her by her landlady bore no relation at all to either soaring or repose. Elisabeth studied the bill, then ran away to get her purse and pay it. She had paid nothing since she arrived, and it occurred to her all at once that her landlady might perhaps think she had no money. Then she went up-stairs and studied the bill again. It was

moderate enough. They were not grasping people, and the season was hardly yet begun ; but to Elisabeth, accustomed to her husband's estimate of things, and unused to living at an hotel, it appeared sufficiently formidable. Even in a green seclusion one could not live without eating and drinking ; nor eat and drink, it would appear, without a considerable bill. Clearly a green seclusion was not eternally feasible ; and Elisabeth had no sooner come to this conclusion than her mind with an eager rebound lost itself in schemes of action. She would not die yet—not yet, she thought, even in name—that project was rejected, or, at least, postponed ; but the plan she had first formed at Venice took more definite shape. She would go to some city—to Dresden, she thought—and live by giving lessons. A very small beginning would content her ; she could live so cheaply and simply, and she never doubted that she would be able to get on. She hardly knew why she fixed on Dresden, except that it was distant, and that the name carried with it a certain charm. Elisabeth was aware, of course, that she had three hundred a year of her own ; but that fact never entered into her calculations for a single moment. It was her husband's money now, not hers, so she had come to understand. If it had been otherwise, she would never have put in a claim for it. No ; to earn her own living was her idea. She felt sure that she could do it. She knew that she could live economically ; she had had no lack of experience in that direction ! Yes, she would go to Dresden ; but before going to Dresden she would go to Schlossberg.

Schlossberg had been in her mind ever since she left Venice, but she could not venture there before. Emilia might be there, and Gordon Temple. (Elisabeth knew no sharper pang than when those names came into her mind ; she could not think of Emilia ; she turned away her thoughts from Gordon Temple.) But now that more than three weeks had elapsed--how strange an eternity it seemed to Elisabeth !—they would certainly have gone to Venice. Frau Werner, too, would not yet have returned ; she might wander through the town and meet not one familiar face. An irresistible longing drew her to the place where she had spent the only happy months her lonely girlhood had known. She could go now ; she might never be able to go again. If she were, indeed, to sever herself utterly from the past, she must at least bid farewell to the place which had made itself dearer to her than any

other in the world. Certain fragments of her past had strange value for Elisabeth—unthought-of moments, places here and there that she had hung and tapestried, as it were, with dreams and emotions, though they were no more considerable, to take an example, than an ill-furnished attic with sloping walls. And what place had she hung and tapestried like Schlossberg?

Schlossberg drew her irresistibly. A day and a night she would spend there, then pass into the vast unknown.

CHAPTER XLII.

SCHLOSSBERG AGAIN.

It was in the early morning (she had travelled all night) that Elisabeth found herself alighting at the Schlossberg station. She had alighted there but once before, on that moonlit night of her first arrival nearly four years ago. She had been seventeen then, she was one-and-twenty now; and the long intricate years spun by youth, so different from the tattered fragments that slip and fly from older and feebler hands—that long web of years, I say, held the history of her married life. No need of further words to express the strange remoteness of that distant night when she had wandered in lonely ecstasy through the magic of an enchanted hour, from this present morning in July that saw her there again. It had rained during the night; and though the rain had almost ceased now, a gray layer of clouds overspread the sky. Moist odors rose from the garden planted outside the railway-station; the branches of the trees dripped in the gray air on to the walks below. Elisabeth took a carriage and drove to the Kaiserhof; she knew, indeed, of no other hotel to go to; that and the Pension Werner comprised all her practical acquaintance with the hostelries of Schlossberg.

A not unnatural chance led her to the same little room she had occupied before, a room reserved for such stray wanderers as herself. The place lay spread before her, with the women clanking to and fro across the wet paving-stones to the fountain in the centre; the mist lay low upon the wooded hills beyond. Elisabeth ordered some breakfast to be brought to her in her room; she had no courage

to go down to the big dining-room, to occupy its length alone; she had an odd feeling, besides, that she might see the Baroness come in through the open window, followed by Emilia with little Ida dragging at her skirt—she remembered it all so well, Emilia and the sunny terrace, and herself in her little brown schoolgirl frock, waiting for her coffee and reading her story-book the while. The frock she had on now was gray instead of brown; there was not much difference otherwise; and there was no sunshine to-day. Elisabeth took off her hat; presently her breakfast came, and afterward she sat for a long time leaning back in one of the velvet armchairs, looking now at the room, now at the sky outside. The narrow room with its velvet and its gilt clock, its wax candles and its shining parquet, seemed to her quite as splendid as before. She was afraid she might have to pay a great deal for it; that was a consideration that occupied her thoughts in these days. She wished she could have gone to her old room in the Pension Werner; she would have felt more at home there; but that, of course, was impossible. Already a profound depression began to settle down upon her; this was not what she had come to Schlossberg to find. It was her old self, it was the irrecoverable past, she had hoped to meet; and this was not the past. That had lived in her memory and her dreams; but here she could only sit and measure the distance that separated her from it all. A profound depression settled down upon her, and a profounder sense of disappointment. She had meant to do so much, she had meant to be so good. She recalled her vision—it came back to her so clearly here, that vision—of scaling that difficult path of goodness step by step, with her husband before her to hold her by the hand, till the very gates of heaven should open to her gaze as she had imagined them open to him and he standing in the glow. Alas! that divine glow had passed into darkness; and she herself, with feet slipping and stumbling in hidden and unaccustomed ways, felt hardly a stepping-stone left to give her footing, much less a heaven-ascending ladder trod by angels. For where, after all, had she been right—where had she been wrong?

The problem is a common one to such natures as Elisabeth's, where a strong individuality is forever in revolt against a scarcely less strong instinct of submission, and experience has not yet adjusted their several claims; but she did not know that. She contemplated her life and

thought it singular ; and it weighed upon her with that darkness of fatality that attends a sense of isolation. She started up at last, and put on her hat quickly. She had come to perform a pilgrimage, to visit the empty shrines of vanished joys, with the vague hope of finding at least some lingering glow and fragrance shaken from the raiment of the departed gods. The hope was fallen dead enough already ; but she would still perform her pilgrimage. She put on her hat, pulling her veil down over her face. It was a gray gauze veil that she had got for travelling, and thick enough, she felt sure, to conceal her identity from any chance acquaintance she might meet—any old classmate or professor—should any such still remember her. She ran down-stairs and out into the familiar streets. Familiar, indeed ! The very voices of the people, the ring of their steps on the cobble-stone pavement, the names above the shop-fronts, the clang of bells overhead, the children playing with the little streams of water that ran along the gutters after the heavy rain—not one of these things but spoke to Elisabeth, pierced her with vain longings after those lost days, that irrecoverable past. She stood presently before the Pension Werner. The sitting-room window was open ; there was the sound of a jingling piano, a shrill voice running up the scale ; the street-door was flung back ; two children, with satchels on their arms, came hopping down the steps ; then a young girl in a gray waterproof cloak (it might have been Elisabeth's self in those old days), who opened her umbrella, turned her face up to the sky, then closed it again, and picking her steps, made her way up the street. Elisabeth walked quickly away ; she felt an outcast, a wanderer ; a terrible sense came over her of what she had done in cutting herself adrift from all the wonted familiarities of life, and a yearning she did not know how to stifle for the friends whom she had loved and who had loved her. She walked on quickly ; her feet would have taken her almost without conscious volition, they moved so readily in the direction of Madame von Waldorf's house. How often she had thought of it, that charming, cheerful, friendly house ; and there it was. There was no open door or window here ; it was all shuttered, blank and deserted—but that she had expected ; it would have been a shock to her to find it otherwise. And yet it struck her sadly. She turned away in a moment, and went down the lane that ran by the side of the house. There was a garden-door there that

often stood unlocked, the gardener living in a cottage close by ; she would like to see the garden again, Elisabeth thought. The front of the house was like death ; one felt that death had lately passed there. She would so willingly carry away with her into exile some brighter memory.

The door was on the latch, as she had hoped, and passing in, she wandered down the gravel paths. All was clear and tranquil here ; the garden was blooming with roses, red and white and fragrant under the gray sky ; their scent mingled with the wholesome odors of fresh-stirred earth and wet turf. The birds twittered and flew in and out of the shrubs and trees ; a little pond lay clear and quivering in its shallow basin, where Ida's gold-fish were darting to and fro. A sunbeam, piercing the clouds, shone reflected in one or two unshuttered windows on this side of the house ; but the terrace-doors leading into Emilia's drawing-room were closed, and no one seemed stirring but a gardener and his boy, working at some little distance with their backs turned toward Elisabeth. She paused on the edge of the pond, afraid to venture further, and stood looking up and down at the familiar scene. She was glad—yes, she was glad to have seen it all again ; but a sadness weighed on her heart like lead ; and in a moment she turned away, afraid that one of the servants left in charge of the house might see and recognize her, and made her way back toward the door by which she had entered. The path led by the Baroness's little garden-house. The door was unlocked here also ; it was never locked ; it was not supposed that any robber would care to come in and carry off one of the Baroness's works of art, and in the Baroness's absence the gardener had a habit of desecrating the place with his wheel-barrow and spade. The door stood ajar now ; Elisabeth pushed it open and went in.

In a moment she wished she had not ; it all looked so dreary. Dead leaves had drifted on to the floor ; the laurel-wreaths that the Baroness's sentiment had placed here and there hung forlorn and withered. Emilia, in fact, cared little for the place, which she had the habit of laughing at as her aunt Irma's Folly, and rarely entered it from one year's end to another. To Elisabeth it seemed peopled by ghosts, arranged in symmetrical order on shelves. She caught sight of her own charming head, and went up to look at it. She had not thought it like herself

when it was done, three or four years ago; she had been used to contemplate it with a shy wish that she were as pretty as that; but looking at it now, she saw that it really did resemble her. As the Baroness had foreseen, she had grown into the likeness. But it detained her attention for a moment only; her glance fell on her husband's bust placed beside it. Changed as he was, how like it was to him still—how like! As if it had been yesterday, Elisabeth recalled some words she had spoken on the occasion of her first visit to the garden-house. Alas, alas! She turned and hurried from the place.

She looked at her watch when she was outside in the lane again, and at the same time a church clock overhead struck eleven. It was still early. Elisabeth, in arranging her plans beforehand, had resolved to spend the day at Schlossberg and to sleep there. A day had seemed only too short to count over the memories of six eventful months. But the shrines where she had thought to tell her beads showed so far little better than graves, where nothing stirred but her own poignant consciousness. Why had she come? she said to herself. It had been a mistake. To revive vain longings, to weep futile tears over a past that was dead, was an employment for fools; it weakened her resolution; it made her afraid of life. She would go away at once. When Schlossberg was behind her she would try to forget, Elisabeth said to herself, wrung to her very soul; she would find again the sense of freedom, the eager power that had animated her in her little Tyrolese inn. But before leaving Schlossberg there was one thing that she still greatly cared to do—to go to the terrace of the old Schloss and look at the far historic view, the same that she had loved from her attic window. There was time for that before the afternoon train that she would take; and better that than to pass the hours in her narrow velvet and gilded room. Before the vast expanse of plain and mountain that she loved, her bruised fancy might find wings again; she would feel stronger, not weaker, to go on. The brightening day encouraged her, the breaking clouds, the sun that shone more fully every moment. She walked on rapidly with her swift young steps, through the streets, up the steep windings of the road that climbed the hill.

She stood leaning on the stone parapet of the terrace, gazing on the immense plain shining and shadowed in fleeting sunshine, on the winding river, on the blue of the distant mountains clear against a space of clear blue sky,

beneath ranges of broken and rolling clouds. Her mind sprang to meet it. Yes, it was all as beautiful as she had remembered it. This was the right place in which to part with Schlossberg; the future opened again; here she could bid farewell to her past life. She stood gazing at the view for a long time; it seemed probable to her that she would never see it again; she had looked her last on Schlossberg, she felt, for years and years to come, at any rate. She turned at last, at the sound of an approaching footstep, that warned her she was no longer alone (the terrace had been empty until now); and as she turned, she came face to face with Gordon Temple. It was the most natural thing in the world he should be there; he had simply postponed his departure from Schlossberg. But Elisabeth, cruelly startled, checked her first movement to go, and stood staring at him without the presence of mind to pass him—if, indeed, she wished to pass him—as though they had been strangers.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ELISABETH RECEIVES NEWS.

He recognized her instantly, and Elisabeth, perceiving that it was so, put up her veil. They looked at each other strangely. He turned rather pale, and grasped the hand she held out.

"I had no idea, Mrs. Holland, that you were here," he said.

"I arrived this morning," she answered, faltering a little. Then, after a pause: "I thought you were in Venice."

"I was—I mean, I intended to be there by this time," Gordon answered; "but I have been detained in Schlossberg. There has been a good deal to see to."

Elisabeth stood silent for a minute. "You have been in trouble since I saw you," she said at last, timidly. "I have been very sorry for you."

"I have been in trouble? You mean about my father? Yes, I knew you would be sorry. It was a great blow to me. But he was very old, and the end was peaceful."

He looked away from her as he spoke, and stood resting his folded arms on the top of the parapet. An extraordinary embarrassment fell between them. Elisabeth did

not know what to think or what to say. This was what she had dreaded, to meet someone she knew ; and yet she had a sense of relief. The confidence with which Gordon always inspired her did not fail her now. She felt sure that, if she were to ask him, he would say nothing about having met her ; and after these last forlorn hours there was no doubt it was a relief. Only that made no difference, she would still have to go away ; nothing could change that. It was Gordon who first spoke again.

"Mrs. Holland," he said, "forgive my asking, but does no one in Venice know that you are here ?"

"No one," said Elisabeth, faltering again.

"You know—no, I suppose you don't know—that Emilia is there ? She arrived the morning after you left ; and the Baroness has been there for the last fortnight."

"No, I did not know," said Elisabeth, quivering a little with a wretched sensation. These familiar names raised a tumult in her mind.

"I am thankful—I thank heaven I have met you !" said Gordon, facing round upon her. "We have been in terrible anxiety about you."

The color rushed painfully to Elisabeth's face. It was the first touch of reality she had met from the outer world.

"Oh, I had to go—I had to go !" she cried, involuntarily.

"I know—I know," said Gordon, abruptly, turning away again. "Of course I understood. I understood."

Elisabeth was silent for a minute ; a hundred things to say presented themselves at once. The particular confidence she had in Gordon, an immediate sense too, perhaps, of being set on her trial, as it were, urged her from her usual reticence.

"You mean——" she began, and paused ; then changed her sentence. "I knew I could not explain," she said at last, with an effort. "Of course I have thought a great deal about what my husband would feel. That has made me very unhappy ; but I couldn't help it. I thought —I think still—it might be better that everyone should believe me dead. It would make everything simpler, if I could only disappear altogether."

"How can you think or say such things ?" said Gordon, with a sort of angry agitation. He recovered himself immediately. "I said that I understood," he went on ; "but I do not. I don't understand why, with devoted friends such as you have, ready to sympathize with any—any trouble you may be in, you should think any extreme

step necessary. The first thing the Baroness said—you must know it was the first thing she would say—was, 'Why did she not come to me?'"

"I did think of it," cried Elisabeth. Gordon, unwittingly, had checked her first impulse to confidence. She felt put upon her defence. "I cannot explain everything," she said more calmly; "and it would be no good if I could. But I thought of everything over and over again. I didn't wish my husband to know where I was, and if I had gone to Vienna he must have known. And then I wanted—I had to be free; and that would leave him free also. I have not been able to make him happy——"

"You have not made him happy—good Lord!" said Gordon. "And as if that, after all, were the point."

"It is the point, of course," said Elisabeth, simply enough. "If I could have made him happy, the rest wouldn't have signified so much. And I meant to—I meant to——" The tears rushed to her eyes; then, terrified at Gordon's silence, "You don't think," she cried, "that I ought to go back?"

Could Gordon have followed the impulse of the moment, he might have told that she should never go back—that the devotion of a life was at her service, to use or to abuse as she pleased. She appeared to him divinely simple as she stood and talked about her husband after going through, he felt sure, a furnace of moral suffering before she could act as she had done. Happily, an habitually sane man is not left an altogether helpless victim to an insane impulse. What his face expressed, indeed, he could not tell; but he saw a startled look come into Elisabeth's eyes, and she drew back a step. He turned abruptly on his heel, and walked away to the end of the terrace. He had, in fact, that to tell her that should make the repression of any momentary impulse easy. He would not have told her if he could have helped it—it could only give her pain she ought to be spared, he said to himself; but he felt she might make it, and justly, an eternal reproach to him if he did not. In a minute he came back. Elisabeth was standing as he had left her, her arms dropped at her side; but she held out her hand as he approached.

"I must go," she said. "Good-by."

"No; wait one moment," he said, rather hoarsely. "You have heard nothing, of course," he went on hurriedly, "from Venice since you left?"

"No, nothing," she said, letting her hand fall again, and

taking alarm from his voice and look. "Oh, has anything happened? What has happened?"

"No, no," he said, quickly, "nothing has happened; but you cannot—of course, you cannot—have heard that your husband is very ill?"

"Worse?" she said, with dilating eyes.

'Yes—I am afraid he is worse."

There was a minute's silence. "Will you tell me exactly?" said Elisabeth, coming a step nearer, and laying one hand on the stone parapet; "I left him much better; I had never, since we married, known him so well. I couldn't have left him otherwise."

"No, no; that of course," he said, turning round now, and speaking with an air of extreme consideration and gentleness; "but I believe, I had better explain, as you request me, how matters are. I thought, at the time I was in Venice, that you were a little too hopeful about Robert, that he was not gaining ground as much as you thought; and what has happened since has shown that I was unluckily right. The doctors should have been franker, with you, at any rate, than I imagine to have been the case. As regards Robert, they may have seen reason to be reticent, and no doubt they wished to spare you anxiety; but frankness is always best. Your husband *is* worse, Mrs. Holland. There was always a danger of his breaking down; I mean, it must have come sooner or later: no human power could have prevented it in his state of health, and it has come now."

"When?" said Elisabeth. "I know nothing," she went on hurriedly, "of what happened after I left Venice. I ought to know; tell me everything!"

Gordon hesitated a moment.

"What I know," he said, "I have heard from Emilia. She wrote me such details as she had learned from your old servant. Robert excited himself a good deal to begin with, it appears, about some money that he missed. I don't know what it was. He sent Maddalena to you to fetch it; but you were already gone; and later in the evening he got your note. Miss Fawcett was with him at the time. I don't know what passed, of course; but I gather that she didn't act altogether wisely. After a time she called Maddalena—But all this is odious," said Gordon, breaking off; "no need for me to go through all that. Maddalena went in to your husband the last thing at night; and when she took him his breakfast the next morn-

ing he seemed much the same as usual. But an hour or two later, when she went to him again, she found him almost unconscious in an attack of faintness and exhaustion. She ran at once for a doctor ; fortunately, he has turned out an excellent one. Your husband is thoroughly well cared for; he has a nurse and Emilia arrived the morning he was taken ill. She is in the house with him ; Miss Fawcett left the same day to join some friends at Milan. He rallied from the first attack, he even left his bed for two days ; but about a week ago he had a second attack, and seems unhappily to have no great rallying power left." Gordon stopped, and was silent for a minute ; he had spoken throughout with hesitation, in short detached phrases. Elisabeth stood pale and motionless, except for a nervous movement of her fingers on the parapet beside her. "It is horrible—it is horrible for me to have to tell you all this," Gordon resumed. "I believe I ought not to have told you."

She raised her eyes to his face, then looked away from him at the plain and the hills, and back in his face again. There was a miserable despair in her eyes. She did not speak, but in a moment began slowly drawing on a glove she had taken off, and turned away. Gordon followed her as she moved across the terrace, and began to descend the hill, with steps that quickened to haste as she approached the town. As they passed through the city gate into the street leading to the Place and the hotel, Gordon spoke to her again :

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Holland ?" he said. "Tell me what I can do."

She stood still for a moment. "Oh," she cried, "I want nothing but to start this minute for Venice !" and hurried on as before.

In the early morning of the second day following she found herself in Venice. A telegram from Gordon Temple had preceded her ; and as she stepped from the railway-carriage she was received in Madame von Leuwine's arms.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN CASA HOLLAND.

Elisabeth did not find her husband in the room where she had left him ; in these last weeks the summer heat had set in, and he had been removed to one of the silent and sunless apartments at the back. The front rooms were all closed and shuttered ; and the twilight, the white folded beds in the gloom, the furniture ranged stiffly against the wall, struck Elisabeth chilly, with a chill as of death. All her own things had disappeared ; it was as if she herself had died ; her wardrobe was empty ; not a book, not a ribbon, belonging to her, was to be seen. It was by her husband's orders that they had been swept away. "Clear away all that ; let me never see one of those things again," was almost the first order he had given, in an accent so peremptory that the order was obeyed at once, and Elisabeth's possessions packed away by the women about him, in the trunk she had left behind. A strange consternation had succeeded her flight. It seemed almost incredible at first to the three people who learned it on that fatal evening. Elisabeth had by no means over-estimated—it might have been hard for her to estimate even—her husband's resentment on the discovery of Mr. Brudenel's letter. She had, in fact, created an almost impossible situation, difficult for any man to meet, and for no man more difficult than for Mr. Holland. His attitude toward his wife had always been one of overwhelming superiority as toward her childish ignorance and faultiness ; it was an attitude that had acquired rigidity through his uneasy consciousness of a growing habit of criticism on her part ; but to stand before her at a confessed disadvantage was a position that had lain absolutely outside his powers of imagination. He stood, indeed, at far less disadvantage than he imagined ; there had been a dignity in the words with which he met that accusation from the past which reconciled Elisabeth to him, as we have seen, so far as that was concerned ; but that he did not know. His acquaintance with his wife, after three years of marriage, was still sufficiently superficial in certain directions ; and it was, perhaps, inevitable that she should appear to him in the intolerable light of an accuser. To treat her as the criminal, to throw a coldness and severity

into his manner for the future that should compel silence and submission, was the only issue from an untenable position that occurred to him.

He tore the note through that Maddalena brought to him; he returned the bank-notes. He would demand the money as a right, not accept it as a gift and trivial peace-offering. Only presently, seated in his armchair, partially soothed by the monotony of Dulcie's voice as she read aloud to him the newspaper, of which he did not hear a word, his mind recurred to the money as something pleasant to dwell upon in that afternoon's painful work. He wished now that he had kept it; he would like to know that it was safely locked away in his bureau. It was a sum that represented the savings and scrapings of many months, and Elisabeth was always so lamentably heedless. When old Maddalena brought in the tea, he desired her to summon Elisabeth, with the result we know; and presently, Elisabeth not returning, he went himself to make a search in her room. To lock up her private drawers and boxes was a habit he had never been able to enforce on his wife; she was incorrigible in her confidence in other people's honesty, and to-day, as usual, he found everything open. But the money, safe in Elisabeth's travelling-purse, and well on its way to Munich, was naturally not to be found. Mr. Holland opened drawer after drawer with increasing uneasiness and irritation. Elisabeth might as likely as not —she was so criminally heedless—have left the bank-notes on the table; and who was to guarantee the old Italian woman's honesty? They might be in her pocket that moment. As Mr. Holland, however, could not actually prosecute his researches so far as Maddalena's pockets, he returned with his slow steps to the sitting-room to await his wife's return. When the dinner-hour approached and passed and she did not appear, he began to find her absence inexplicable. Miss Fawcett exhausted herself in ejaculations and surmises.

"If Mr. Temple were in Venice," she said, presently, "one might almost think that Mrs. Holland had met him and gone with him in his gondola. They used to take such very long rows together."

"We will at least not wait dinner," said Mr. Holland, with severity, and taking no notice of this ingenious supposition. "Oblige me, my dear, by telling Maddalena to serve it. I cannot always make her understand me."

Miss Fawcett made no more open suggestions; but

nothing being, as a fact, more richly suggestive to the human fancy than an unexpected absence—still more, an unexpected return delayed—both she and Mr. Holland allowed the widest range to their imagination in the succeeding hours. Mr. Holland, conscious of unusual, if deserved, harshness toward his wife, felt increasing anxiety as the evening went on. He had desired Elisabeth to go, and she was gone; and now he thought of flight with that hundred pounds in her pocket, now of an easy plunge into one of the dark waterways about them, or of a boat upset, and a body dragged ashore. It passed through his mind then, what it would be to live without his wife; he strained his ear for the sound of the door-bell; had Elisabeth appeared at that moment, he might have welcomed her, in his relief, with pardon. And then there was the money. His mind slipped from that sterner thought of loneliness—after all, that was a fancy, his wife would never really dare to leave him—to that problem of the money. Where could she have put it? "My dear," he said in the course of the evening, to Dulcie, "oblige me by going to Elisabeth's room, and seeing whether she has left an envelope, with some money in it, lying anywhere about. It ought to be locked up. Perhaps it has fallen down somewhere; your eyes are sharper than mine." He longed for the money; he could have shed tears of rage at his own folly. Twice that day it had lain within his grasp, and he had let it go. Dulcie, her curiosity agreeably quickened, went on her fruitless errand. Her imagination had passed through a lighter range of fancy. Fed by crude French novels, it flew off in the direction of Gordon Temple. She had been shrewd enough to perceive that he admired Elisabeth; what could be easier to an agile imagination, fed by crude French novels, than to believe Elisabeth was in love with him? It required but another step to conceive a guilty and romantic flight on her side to join him. Dulcie did not absolutely believe this, any more than Mr. Holland believed that his wife had thrown herself into a canal; but, after all, one supposition was as good as, and on the whole more amusing than, another.

Later in the evening, Elisabeth's letter, posted on her way to the station arrived. Maddalena brought it in, and stood lingering in the doorway, rubbing her old hands on her apron with a prevision that it concerned her young mistress. Mr. Holland took the note, saw that it had passed through the post, and opened it with a trembling

agitation altogether removed from his usual deliberate action. He read the letter through, crushed it up, and raised himself in his chair, a hand on either arm, gazing before him, as though in act to rise and go he knew not whither. His silence, his pallor, his fixed gaze and heavy frown, alarmed Dulcie.

"What is it? what has happened?" she cried. "Has anything happened? Is it about Elisabeth?"

He turned his head and looked at her a moment.

"My dear," he said, "you have mentioned a name I never desire to hear again. My wife has left my house; oblige me by silence on that point henceforward and always."

"Oh!" cried Dulcie, "do you mean that Mrs. Holland has really—really—is it Mr. Temple?"

"What? Damnation!" shouted the clergyman, starting to his feet. "God forgive me!" he added immediately, sinking into his chair again. "Excuse me, my dear, you are a child; you don't know what you are saying. Oblige me—oblige me by going once more and looking for that money; there is nearly a hundred pounds; it is important it should be found. Take Maddalena with you."

He waved his hand toward the door. He did not really suppose the money would be found; he was convinced now that Elisabeth had taken it with her; but he wanted to be alone. All his latent jealousy of Gordon Temple, a jealousy fed by uneasy dislike of Gordon himself, burst into flame at Dulcie's words. He attempted no argument, he did not wait to reason. His wife had left him, she had deserted him; she had robbed and betrayed him. He was a clergyman and a Christian after his own fashion, but if Elisabeth had stood there before him he could have found the force to murder her.

He had risen and was moving about the room when Dulcie returned. He merely nodded in answer to her report that the money had not been found, and began smoothing out Elisabeth's note, that he might lock it away in his desk. Should he ever find his anger growing weaker, that would be there to revive it. Then, turning to Dulcie, he held out his hand to wish her good-night. "You are a good girl, my dear—a good girl," he said, and went away to his room. Before going to bed he looked through all Elisabeth's papers—there were not many—and tore them up; he ransacked her drawers once more, turning out the

contents on to the floor. Maddalena found them scattered there the next morning. He felt no failure of strength or lack of energy then; but he presently rang, after he was in bed, and desired Maddalena to prepare him a sleeping-draught. The old woman was clumsy, and he had difficulty in making her understand what he wanted. He missed his wife, his submissive handmaid, his faithful nurse, and a flood of weakness and self-pity came over him; he turned his face to the pillow to hide a gush of tears. But a deeper, more enduring sentiment of anger still sustained him; only twelve hours later the reaction came.

That this immense mental shock had hastened the end could not, perhaps, be disputed; but that the end had, in any case, been within measurable distance, a question of months, perhaps even of weeks, could not be doubted, either, by anyone who understood the doctor's report. Mr. Holland had been dying for months past, he said; it was one of those lingering cases in which life drags on through a remnant of vital energy, that one thing or another may quench in a moment. He had an extraordinary power of living, the doctor added to Madame von Waldorf, when for two days her brother rallied and left his bed; but it could not last; it would have been impossible in any case that it should last. This was the view of the matter that the Baroness was anxious to impress on Elisabeth. She did not resist it, nor cry out that she had killed her husband; she understood very well at last that the question of life and death had long ago ceased to hang in the balance; but that did not in the least lift the darkness that weighed upon her. She had meant to be a good wife, and she had left her husband to die alone; that was the thought that constantly possessed her; nothing could alter that. Elisabeth was a sufficiently complex person, but now her whole being seemed to have passed into one emotion. It was as if her conscience had been scorched, and gave but one sensation, whatever touched it. She said very little, however; the Baroness asked no questions, and Elisabeth made no confidences. Of what use were attempts at consolation? Mr. Holland was dying; there was no more to be said. He lay dying in a silent chamber apart, to which his wife was refused admittance.

Elisabeth never knew all the sources of her husband's anger, but the anger itself could not long be kept from her. He was angry with her still; he had not relented,

then, from those last words. That was how she interpreted it. And, in fact, in what concerned Gordon Temple, not a word then, or later, ever reached her ears. All that first day she sat in the darkened rooms in alternate throbs of expectation and despair. The sight of the familiar apartment in such altered aspect, the vacant bedroom, her husband's empty chair—these commonplace trappings of grief and separation were poignant to her. The windows were closed, as well as the shutters, to exclude the heated air, and the silence was another element of strangeness. The golden radiant view, the cries from the water, the splendid vision of light and color that we call Venice, might have been swept into another planet, they seemed so remote from this still interior. Madame von Waldorf came in presently to greet her sister-in-law. Elisabeth had not seen her since her marriage ; it was not under circumstances such as these they had expected to meet again, and few words—words were so impossible—passed between them. It was on Emilia that the first shock of these events had fallen, when going, on her arrival to Venice, to call at the Casa Holland, she found her brother apparently dying, and his wife disappeared into space. It was inevitable that she should blame Elisabeth severely, for it was impossible for her to conceive an adequate reason for her flight, and there was no one at hand to suggest one.

The story was told her in the first instance by old Maddalena, who was imperfectly informed ; and of Dulcie, to whom Madame von Waldorf took an instantaneous dislike —she found that young lady, who passes from these pages in the act, packing her boxes to start by the evening train for Milan—she made no inquiries whatever. The whole remained a mystery to Emilia, the more so that Mr. Holland, as he acquired consciousness of her presence in the house, showed a particular dislike—he was at no trouble to conceal it—to having her about him. He hardly ever spoke to her ; Elisabeth's name he never mentioned. He never even, to her knowledge, alluded to what had happened, beyond the one imperative order to take his wife's things out of his sight. One person, indeed, Emilia had the impression was more in his confidence, and that was Mr. Sparrow. The British chaplain was constant in his visits ; he was always admitted, by Mr. Holland's orders ; and though he was not always allowed to remain and talk, the sick man invariably showed pleasure in seeing him. But Mr. Sparrow came and went with an impenetrable air ;

and Emilia did not like him sufficiently to attempt to discuss her brother's private affairs with him. She found it all dreadfully sad ; she was separated for the first time in her life from her child—she had thought it best to leave Ida with her nurse at the hotel—and it seemed tragic to her that there should be no news of Elisabeth. Severely as she blamed her, this total disappearance of one so closely connected with herself weighed upon her terribly. She wrote at once both to the Baroness and to Gordon Temple—of the blank dismay produced by her letter in the latter case she had no conception—asking advice as to what could be done. But what, after all, could be done ! Elisabeth had left no clew ; they did not even know by what train she had left, in what direction she was gone. Emilia felt that, whatever happened, it might be hard to forgive her.

It was a little better after the Baroness arrived. She also stayed at the hotel, and could certify that the nurse maintained her usual precision of freshness in the matter of Ida's muslin pinafores, and that the child's dinner was served exactly as her mother could wish. Ida had fallen in love with her gondolier, she reported, and had a plan for building a cottage in the garden at Schlossberg, and transporting him and his wife and his gondola and his numerous children thither, that he might row her every day on the river. Concerning Elisabeth, the Baroness had much less to say. The whole matter was a sorrow and an anxiety of which she found it hard to speak ; it was an especial grief that Elisabeth should not have addressed one word to herself. But whenever she did speak of it—the subject came up inevitably between her and Emilia every day—it was to defend Elisabeth. "You are a sensible woman, Emilia," she would say, "very sensible ; and yet you declare you can imagine no reason for Elisabeth's conduct. Do you suppose she ran away without reason, for the mere pleasure of the thing ? You don't ? Very well, then ; she had some reason that we know nothing about. What it was I won't pretend to say ; but if I were to hazard a guess that your brother had made her too miserable for her to put up with it any longer, I have an idea I should not be far wrong."

"Dear Aunt Irma," Emilia replied, "Robert is not a brute."

"I don't say he is ; but that by no means implies he has not been brutal to his wife. You are a reasonable person,

Emilia, and I don't expect you to argue with me that every wife is bound to put up with what her husband pleases. God knows there are women enough who can do it and will do it. I don't say they are wrong—quite the contrary. I know enough about that. Only when you see a child like Elisabeth, who was ready to cut her head off to do what she thought right, and find she has thrown up everything, I maintain it was not without reason ; that is all. If ever your brother gets better, and I can see and talk with him, I will get at the truth of the matter. Meanwhile, don't let us say a word more ; it cuts me to the heart !"

It was only to be expected, therefore, that the meeting between the sisters-in-law should be embarrassed on either side. Emilia, however, was in truth too reasonable not to adjust the blame with some attempt at equity. It had not been all Elisabeth's fault ; she had never supposed that ; and granted that Elisabeth should have endured everything rather than conduct herself as she had done, she was at least suffering cruelly. She kissed her, therefore ; coldly at first, more cordially as she felt Elisabeth's clinging touch in answer ; and sitting down by her on a sofa, she took her hand in hers.

"We think Robert a little better to-day," she said, kindly. "He is very weak, you understand, of course ; but he is able to sit up a little in bed, supported by pillows, and the change rests him."

A longing—a longing such as she had never thought to feel again, to go to her husband, to be with him and help him, filled Elisabeth's whole soul. "Won't he see me ?" she said in a voice shaken by anguish. "Mayn't I go to him ?"

Madame von Waldorf experienced a momentary embarrassment. "Robert has not yet been told that you are here," she said at last. "I see very little of him. That is natural ; he is not accustomed to me, and we have never been great friends, as you know." Certainly, Elisabeth had reason to know it. "But he shall be told," Emilia hastened to add. "Only he is extremely weak ; it is essential to avoid agitation."

"Oh, I must go to him—I must !" said Elisabeth, starting up ; but she did not move toward the door. She stood still with her hands locked and an expression on her face that touched Emilia to a gentler sympathy than she had shown yet.

"Dear Lisa," she said, "you must have patience. He shall be told, he shall; but he is vexed, you know. That is natural——"

"Oh, I know!" said Elisabeth, dropping into her seat again. She urged the point no more.

It was to Mr. Sparrow, though she did not inform Elisabeth of the fact, that Emilia had determined to commit the task of instructing Mr. Holland of his wife's return. She did not like Mr. Sparrow; but in these three weeks, in which he had never once failed in his daily visit to his brother clergyman, she had perceived that a strong friendship existed between the two men, and that the chaplain had more influence over her brother than any other person who had access to him. She presently left Elisabeth at the sound of the suppressed ring at the bell that announced the clergyman's arrival, and went into the anteroom to waylay him in his course to the sick-room. In the briefest phrase she made known her request.

"His wife is come back?" said Mr. Sparrow, rubbing the hair off his forehead. "It is very good of you to receive her."

"That is not the point," said Madame von Waldorf, gently. "My request, Mr. Sparrow, is simply that you would inform my brother of her arrival, and ascertain whether he will see her. She is exceedingly anxious to go to his room; but we are afraid of agitating him."

"I'll tell him, of course," said Mr. Sparrow; "but he'll never see her in the world after the way she's behaved; that you may take my word for. An ill-conditioned hussy! I beg your pardon, ma'am; but I never see the use of mincing matters, and before her husband sees her he might be glad to know what she has done with Mr. Temple."

"Mr. Temple!" Emilia said, turning pale. "What can you mean, Mr. Sparrow? What has Mr. Temple to do with it?"

"Simply, madam, I understood from that young lady who was staying here—a sly girl; I didn't like her; but she seemed to know what she was talking about—and as poor Holland himself half admitted, his wife ran away with a large sum of money to join Mr. Temple. That's all."

Emilia was speechless for a moment. "There is some most extraordinary mistake," she said then with calmness. "You would be doing me the greatest favor, Mr. Sparrow,

by disabusing my brother's mind of any such idea. I don't attempt to justify his wife's conduct, nor do I know what reasons she has to offer for its justification ; we have not discussed the subject. But one thing is certain : Mr. Temple, until three days ago, when he happened to meet Mrs. Holland by chance at Schlossberg, had no more knowledge of where she was than you or I had. He has been at Schlossberg for the last month, and my sister-in-law, by her own account, has been at the little village of San Benedetto, in the Tyrol. In any case, both the one and the other are incapable of the conduct you would attribute to them. If you were to question my brother, I am certain you would find he has no real grounds for such a belief."

"I don't know whether I can question your brother or not," said Mr. Sparrow, bluntly ; "it depends upon how I find him. In any case, madam, I should have thought you, as his nearest relation, were the proper person to talk to him on the subject. You are in and out of his room all day, and more concerned in his affairs than anyone else."

Madame von Waldorf colored a little, but kept her temper with her usual sweetness.

"That," she said, "would be perfectly true under ordinary circumstances ; but, as I think you must be aware, Mr. Sparrow, various causes have combined to keep my brother's life and mine widely apart. An old and intimate friend, like yourself, may easily be more in his confidence than I am."

She moved away as she spoke, and Mr. Sparrow, with a half-bow, disappeared on his way to the sick-chamber.

CHAPTER XLV.

SOME HOURS OF SUSPENSE.

Elisabeth was tired out, was exhausted ; but she was only induced to go to bed that evening on the most positive assurances given that if her husband mentioned her name even, she should be called. He knew that she was there—so much she had been told ; but she also knew that he refused to see her. It was after she had left the room that Emilia communicated her conversation with Mr. Sparrow to the Baroness, who, somewhat to her sur-

prise, received the communication in silence. After waiting a few minutes while Madame von Leuwine continued to write a letter on which she was engaged, Emilia looked up from her work.

"Well, Aunt Irma," she said; "but, after all, what do you think of it?"

"I think nothing at all," replied the Baroness. "It is a subject that cannot engage my thoughts for a moment. I have better occupation for them."

"Well, but after all," began Emilia again, unable to help laughing a little, "someone must think about it. Robert seems to believe the story implicitly."

"Very well," said the Baroness, "let it engage his thoughts then. My dear Emilia," she continued, laying down her pen, "if a man is such a fool that, after being married three years to a woman like Elisabeth, he can believe her capable of running off, *à propos* to nothing, or indeed *à propos* to anything, with a lover, he must be left to his folly. Men are fools, of course; once put some idiotic jealous notion well into their heads—and a baby can do it—and they become incapable of distinguishing between a good woman and a bad one. That is a story as old as the hills. As for Robert, I have no patience with him."

"Ah, poor Robert! you are hard upon him," said Emilia. "You forget how ill he is; that should excuse a great deal. And then, after all," she added, reasonably, "when a man's wife suddenly disappears, one cannot expect him to hold to fine distinctions; he is likely to believe anything and everything."

"Ah, my dear Emilia, that is outrageous—that is unpardonable!" cried the Baroness, "when you know there is not one word of truth in the story. One would imagine you really believed Elisabeth had run away with Gordon."

"How can you say so?" said Emilia, coloring. "Of course, I know the contrary. In the first place, Gordon——"

"Ah, pardon me, in the first place, Elisabeth," said the Baroness, with some vivacity. "As for Gordon—— But, in the first place, or the second place, I see no motive in discussing what is absolutely false. The only thing that disturbs me in the matter is that this absurd fiction is apparently influencing Robert in regard to Elisabeth. I am not hard upon him, heaven knows, not at all—least of all now. There is a good deal amiss in him, but it is too late now for him to try and mend it; a man can stand in

no more pitiful strait than that; and we are all human beings together. But if he goes out of this world without consenting to see Elisabeth, she will never get over it—never. How is he this evening?"

"I have not seen him yet," said Emilia, beginning to fold up her work. "I am going now to take the nurse's place. But the doctor told me to-day, quite frankly, that it is a wonder to him, each day that he comes, to find him still alive. Each day, it seems to him, it can be only a question of hours; he is so terribly weak."

Mr. Holland, however, in spite of the doctor, continued to live on two or three days more. Elisabeth sat through those days in the other part of the house, in a strained anguish and expectation. She made no parade of misery, indeed; that was not her way; she said little, and often took up a book and tried to read; but she could neither eat nor sleep; every time the door opened she started up: it might be someone come to summon her. More than once, sitting there alone, she fancied she heard the bedroom door open—some accident, perhaps, had set it ajar—and her husband's slow step cross the room. She told this to the Baroness, and after that her friend left her alone as little as possible. Mr. Sparrow came and went; but Elisabeth hardly ever saw him; she understood—Emilia had explained it to her gently enough—that he, if anyone, was the mediator between herself and her husband, and that should her presence be desired he would certainly let her know; but unsummoned, she could not bear to speak to him; he had never been her friend. Once or twice she wondered dimly whether Mrs. Sparrow and Mary were still in Venice; but the thought passed away from her mind almost before it arose; only later she learned that the heat had driven them away, and that they had preceded Mr. Sparrow to the scene of his summer chaplaincy. On the third day it was reported that Mr. Holland was somewhat better and stronger than for some time previous. It seemed possible—it seemed just possible—he might rally again, as he had done before. Mr. Sparrow, who came in as usual in the afternoon, stayed a few minutes only with the sick man. On coming out he asked for Madame von Waldorf, and awaited her in the anteroom.

"With your permission," he said, when she came, "I shall return this evening and take the night-watch with your brother. I want to talk to him, and I have noticed" —he had sat up with him once or twice before—"that his

head is always clearer at night. Often in the daytime he is too confused or too weak to follow at length anything I may have to say. To-day he is better, but I don't want to tire him beforehand.

"I have taken a liberty," he went on immediately, without waiting for Madame von Waldorf's acquiescence, which he took for granted.

"You could not do that, Mr. Sparrow," said Emilia, with some earnestness. Nothing could make her like the man —he was invariably rude and overbearing—but she bore him a true gratitude for his kindness to her brother.

"That is as you take it. Not that it much matters ; one does what one thinks right. I wrote to that little Tyrolese place where Mrs. Holland said she had been staying, to know whether her story was true or not, and told them to telegraph an answer back. I find it is true, and I have a copy of my letter and the telegram here to show your brother. He had taken the idea in his head, and it might have been hard to convince him any other way. Holland is like that."

Emilia was silent for a minute.

"I suppose I ought to thank you, Mr. Sparrow——" she began then.

"Not at all ; it's not a matter for thanks. Holland is dying ; he's going out of the world at enmity with his wife—an enmity partly founded on a lie. It is my business as a Christian and a brother-clergyman, to expose the lie and reconcile him with his wife, if possible. I don't know whether I shall succeed. One may be a Christian and yet find it hard to forgive ; but no soul committed to my charge shall die in error if I can prevent it."

He went away. Emilia felt as if she had been flung against a wall and bruised. She caught up Ida, who was coming in at the door at that moment in her fresh white frock with a bunch of roses in her hand, and kissed her passionately. Ida did not like being kissed passionately without reason ; only when she hugged her mother after she had been naughty. She struggled down again, and smoothed out her crumpled frock and frills with dignity. Emilia laughed with tears in her eyes, and took her by the hand.

"Come and give these roses to Aunt Lisa," she said. Poor Elisabeth ! living for years among such people ; Madame von Waldorf had never so pitied her before. She thought she might almost have been tempted to run

away herself, if she had had much to do with Mr. Sparrow.

Elisabeth knew that Mr. Sparrow was to spend the night with her husband. In one way or another she kept herself minutely informed of what went on in the sick-room, though her intimate knowledge of every shade and turn in her husband's illnesses, her memories of hours when she had been the nurse he preferred, though his recognition of the fact had never come with much grace, made the information a torture as exquisite as could be devised. To-night she knew that Mr. Sparrow was sitting up with him, and the thought that her own fate might be in question (though, indeed, she knew nothing of the clergyman's latest conversation with Emilia) set her in a fever of unrest. She could not go to bed. The Baroness went away to her hotel at the usual hour, and she was left with Emilia; but Emilia also, at her urgent request, went to her room; she had sat up all the previous night, and was tired out. Elisabeth remained alone in the sitting-room that held so many memories for her; she had kept more than one vigil here in the early weeks of their stay in Venice, when she had sat up, as it was often her fancy to do, till one or two in the morning reading or writing, while her husband slept quietly in the neighboring apartment. It was different now! The windows stood open to admit the cooler air, and Venice, like some princess of legend seen only at night, rose mysteriously against a clouded sky, with dark waters quivering and shot across here and there by long lines of light, or the darting spark of a gondola. But a gentle rain was falling steadily; the sounds echoing from the water soon died away; silence settled down. Elisabeth drew a chair to the table, and sat with her head resting on her hands. She had a book, but she could not fix her attention for a moment; the years of her married life from the beginning kept coming and going before her like a story. She felt as if in the very beginning she might have turned to the last page and read this end; and fronting now this final consummation of death, she seemed to herself to have been stupidly and criminally blind. Now and then she started up and began to pace the room, then sat down as before. The silence was hard to bear, and the sense of the vacant rooms beyond, and that other chamber that she might not enter. She was waiting she hardly knew for what; but the terrible dread that grew from hour to hour, that her husband

might die without seeing her again, closed upon her more and more. Even now—even now she might hear that it was too late, that all was at an end. If he were to die so, it would be better, she said to herself, that she should die also. Flight would not help her then ; she might fly to the ends of the earth, and yet never escape. She might live to the utmost limit of man's existence, and that silence would never be broken. Only death would be left for her to long for.

In the silence of the night (it was not far from midnight) she could hear a distant door open and footsteps cross the anteroom, echoing on the carpetless floors. They paused a moment, then the door opened and Mr. Sparrow came in. Elisabeth sprang to her feet, looking at him with eyes strained by expectation and dread. His face was pale and fatigued, but she saw immediately that it carried no tidings of death. He came up to the table and stood with his hand resting on it, without speaking. She discerned a change at once from his usual expression ; some emotion, more solemn, deeper, perhaps, than he was wont to experience, had stirred him. His eyes met hers for a moment, but he glanced away instantly.

"I want to speak to you for a moment, Mrs. Holland," he said. He seated himself in an arm-chair as he spoke, with an air of fatigue, and Elisabeth dropped again into the seat from which she had just risen. Her heart beat painfully, but she kept an outward appearance of quiet.

"I can say only a few words," Mr. Sparrow went on ; "your husband is alone, but it is by his desire I came. I have been having a long conversation with him to-night ; he has been more himself than has been the case for some time past. He has spoken to me with great freedom, as one erring mortal may well speak to another when he stands where we all must stand sooner or later. He has told me certain things that have surprised and moved me very much—very much indeed."

A burning color flew to Elisabeth's cheeks ; she had the conviction, and the conviction was exquisitely painful, that her husband had confided to Mr. Sparrow that dim secret of the past. But she did not speak, and the clergyman went on :

"As regards yourself, Mrs. Holland, I may say that certain—certain misapprehensions existing in your husband's mind concerning you have been removed. I myself may have done you some injustice—but that will not greatly con-

cern you. Your husband has had reason, in any case, to feel the deepest offence at your conduct; but standing as he does within measurable distance of eternity, and feeling, as all must feel, that he cannot face without reproach the Eternal Justice, he desires to forgive as he hopes to be forgiven. He has sent me to beg that you will come to him."

"Oh!" cried Elisabeth, starting up; but she trembled so that she could not at once move. She stood steadying herself against the table for a moment. Mr. Sparrow rose also.

"You must be calm," he said, with more of his usual abrupt manner; "your husband is too feeble to stand any nervous or sentimental outbreaks. I cannot permit you to go if you cannot command yourself."

"Oh, I can command myself!" said Elisabeth. She moved away quickly as she spoke. There was a light burning in the anteroom; she took it, and passed through the intervening rooms to the apartment where her husband was lying. At the door of the sick-room Mr. Sparrow laid a warning hand upon her wrist.

"No, no," she said quickly; "you needn't be afraid. I am used to being with him when he is ill."

She pushed the door open and went in. It was a spacious, lofty room, barely furnished, and dimly lighted by a shaded lamp that stood on a table in one corner near the low bed on which Mr. Holland was lying with closed eyes; the windows, closely veiled by thin net curtains, stood open on to a narrow iron balcony; outside was the gentle drip and patter of the rain. Elisabeth crossed the room quietly, and stood by her husband's side. She could not have spoken then; at the sight of that worn, familiar face, she forgot everything but how greatly she had loved him. Presently she became aware that he had opened his eyes and turned his dim gaze upon her. She knelt down by the bed, and taking his hand in hers, pressed her lips to it. The hand was not withdrawn, and she knelt on so for a long time; notwithstanding what she had said to Mr. Sparrow, she found it hard to maintain her self-control. Gradually, however, she forced herself to be calm; her husband was very greatly changed, and one word she must utter before it was too late. She waited till she could command her voice.

"Forgive me, Robert," she said then, with a long-drawn, quivering breath.

He had closed his eyes again, but he turned his head slightly at the words, and looked at her.

"My dear," he said, "all that is at an end. We will say no more about it. . . . If I ever get stronger again—at times I hardly think I shall—we must try to do better."

He spoke in short, interrupted phrases, his fingers moving rather helplessly as they lay in hers. She took his hand in both her own, and mutely laid her cheek and lips against it. There was a long silence. Presently Mr. Holland spoke again.

"My dear," he said, "I cannot talk, but if you would read to me I should be glad. The prayer-book is on the table there. You know what I prefer to hear. And kindly give me a teaspoonful of the cordial, my dear."

She did as he desired, and taking the prayer-book, read to him, until presently she perceived that he had fallen into a doze. But she did not move from her seat beside him. She dismissed Mr. Sparrow, who presently came in softly to finish his night-watch, and sat almost motionless through the succeeding hours. When Emilia came in the early morning to take the clergyman's place she found Elisabeth there.

Later on the nurse came in, but Elisabeth did not leave her husband's side again. His sudden rally the day before had only been that flicker of life that so often precedes death, and he passed from sleep into a stupor from which it became impossible at last to rouse him. He did not speak again to his wife or anyone. The same evening he died.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

Mr. Sparrow read the service over his friend, who had expressed no wish to be buried in England, and was carried in a gondola to his last resting-place among the lagoons of Venice. Returning after the funeral to the Casa Holland, the chaplain presently sought and found Elisabeth in the bright little frescoed room at the end of the apartment. She had not cared to go there before since her return—no place, indeed, could well be more painful to her—and she would hardly have gone there now, but that the other

rooms were, in a sense, occupied. Otto Holland had come to his brother's funeral, bringing with him his wife and children. He was indifferent to heat and mosquitoes, and proposed spending the summer in Venice ; and although his establishment was on the first-floor—he had already engaged some friends to occupy the upper floor during August and September—his vigorous bearing and the clatter of nurses and babies seemed to pervade the whole house. Elisabeth had never before met her husband's half-brother. She was grateful to him for his kindness in leaving them the use of his rooms ; but his handsome and prosperous bearing disconcerted her. Naturally he was indifferent enough to his brother Robert's death ; still more so to his brother Robert's wife. Why should he be otherwise ? Elisabeth retreated to the furthest limit of the apartment, shutting herself up in the sunny little room she had called her own. She looked forlorn enough in her black dress, her eyelids reddened by tears. She was passing through the darkest strait of her life ; remorse and fruitless yearning weighed on her, and the inexorable silence of death. But she was not crying when Mr. Sparrow came in ; she was looking over and sorting some papers, a desperate sort of occupation that seemed to her better than idleness. It was her last day in Venice ; on the next, she and the Baroness, with Madame von Waldorf and Ida, were all to return to Schlossberg ; and to Elisabeth it seemed that she would be deserting her husband afresh. These last terrible days had confused her judgment and confounded all her conclusions. She could no longer retrace the steps that had led up to her flight ; it stood up before her like an isolated crime. Mr. Sparrow sat down opposite to her, put his hat under a chair, and began pulling off his stiff black gloves. Elisabeth watched him for awhile in silence ; she had not seen him alone since her husband's death, and there was something she wanted to say to him. She was discouraged, however, by perceiving that he showed no signs of the more human temper stirred in him by strong emotion on the night that he had come to fetch her to her husband's side. His face had never looked more wooden or unresponsive. She bent forward suddenly at last, letting her papers fall to the ground.

"Mr. Sparrow," she said, "we are going away to-morrow—you are going too, I think—we shall not meet again, I suppose, at present, and I want to thank you. If it had not been for you, I might not have seen or been with my

husband at the last, and then I don't know—I don't know what I should have done."

"You needn't thank me," said Mr. Sparrow, putting his gloves into his hat. "It was on Holland's account I did it. I am willing to allow I misjudged you to a certain extent; I told you so before. But you behaved very badly to your husband; he suffered from it a great deal. You don't suppose I hold you free from blame?"

Elisabeth turned away her head. "You can't blame me more than I blame myself," she said, simply; "that is why it would have been terrible if he would not have seen me."

Mr. Sparrow cleared his throat. "Well, well!" he said in a somewhat softened tone, "it was not this that I came to speak about, Mrs. Holland; it was about your husband's will. I told Madame von Waldorf I should communicate with you at once on the subject. The will which he made at the time of his marriage has not been touched since; everything he should die possessed of was left, as was proper, to you, and he appointed me sole executor. Your husband, however, as I suppose you know, had not much to leave. Your own money was settled on yourself, and he had no personal property beyond some old furniture. He had saved, however, as I understood him, some seven or eight hundred pounds, invested in different securities. The point I have to mention is this. In the conversation I had with him the night before he died, he intimated that he owed a sum of about two hundred pounds to his cousin Mr. Gordon Temple. There is some interest also due, I believe, at the rate of two and a half per cent., which it was agreed upon; but I'm not certain how much."

A sudden flame flew to Elisabeth's cheeks. "When—when was the debt incurred?" she said.

"The point is immaterial; but it was some years ago, when your husband was curate in London. There is no mention of it in the will, probably because Holland had it always in view to pay it himself; so I apply to you to know your wishes in the matter. I may as well mention that your husband expressed a strong wish that the debt should be cancelled without further delay."

"Oh, let it be paid at once!" cried Elisabeth, springing up in agitation; "I had no idea——" She sat down again, covering her face with her hands. Mr. Sparrow took up his hat unmoved.

"Very well," he said; "shall I write about it to Mr. Temple, or will you?"

"Oh, you, please," said Elisabeth; "I couldn't. And at once, please, if it's not troubling you too much."

"It's no trouble at all," said the clergyman. "The money can't be paid yet. There's no money to pay it with till the business of the will has been gone through; I suppose you understand enough about business matters to know that. I presume you wish capital and interest both paid; it's customary, I believe." He rose to go. "I will communicate with you, as may be necessary, concerning the rest of the business," he said; "I shall not see you again before I return to Schlossberg in the autumn."

Elisabeth held out her hand. He took it not very willingly; he had not shaken hands with her before, since her return to Venice. In his heart he resented, hardly less than Mr. Holland himself had done, this slip of a girl's knowledge of his friend's early error. But that could never have occurred to Elisabeth. She had for a moment, indeed, entertained a somewhat similar resentment toward Mr. Sparrow; but she had forgotten it in her gratitude for the service he had done her. He shook hands coldly and reluctantly—that was his way, she thought; and as he left the room the Baroness entered it. Elisabeth went up to her, and put her arms around her neck, hiding her face on her shoulder. She wished that she need never look anyone in the face again.

Some weeks later, the Baroness wrote to Gordon Temple from Schlossberg. "I go to Vienna next week," she said in her letter, "and Elisabeth goes with me; it will be better for her than to remain on here just now. But we both return to Emilia for Christmas; and then perhaps, it may turn out, my dear Gordon, that you will meet her again. She is better than she was, and she will be better still; but it is useless to hope that she will take any fresh outlook on life for months to come. She has been torn to pieces, poor child! and strong as her vitality is, it cannot at once recover full vigor. But it is only a question of time. She has an exceedingly just mind, and there is no fear whatever that she will spend the rest of her life in lamenting over her husband as a lost saint. She knows perfectly well, no one better, that he was not a saint at all; and when all these cruel memories have had time to heal, she will form too just an estimate of his conduct and her own not to resume a healthy attitude toward the world. She has, at any rate, a great liking for you;

a high opinion of you; so much I have discovered. 'Mr. Temple was very good to my husband,' she said the other day; 'I think he must be one of the most generous of men.' I would remind you, however—lest you should grow too conceited on the strength of this opinion—that Elisabeth's imagination is apt to take the strangest flights when once it is engaged. What it was that engaged it in this instance, I don't know, and she has not told me—there are things that she will never tell me or anyone—but perhaps you do; and that being the case, she would not, possibly, forgive me for repeating her words. However, there they are. Have patience! She is very unhappy, very heart-broken now; but she is also very young. All the possibilities of life—and she is capable of appreciating its richest possibilities—are still before her. Presently she will recognize the fact; the past will be as though it has never been. . . ."

The Baroness, though not unfrequently right in her judgments, may be pronounced in this case to have been wrong. Elisabeth's nature might readjust itself indeed—there could be little doubt about that—and the eagerness and wistfulness of her youth return to her. But the past could never become to her as though it had never been. On the contrary, it would always remain a memory of extraordinary vividness, in which a tenderness, born of profound pity toward her husband, would presently leave room for little, so far as he was concerned, besides that other memory, that she had intended—that would always be her point of view—and that she had failed.

That was not the end of her life, nor of the conclusions she was destined to draw from life; but it was the end of the story that had begun for her one August day on board the Rhine boat.

THE END.

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